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FEATURING

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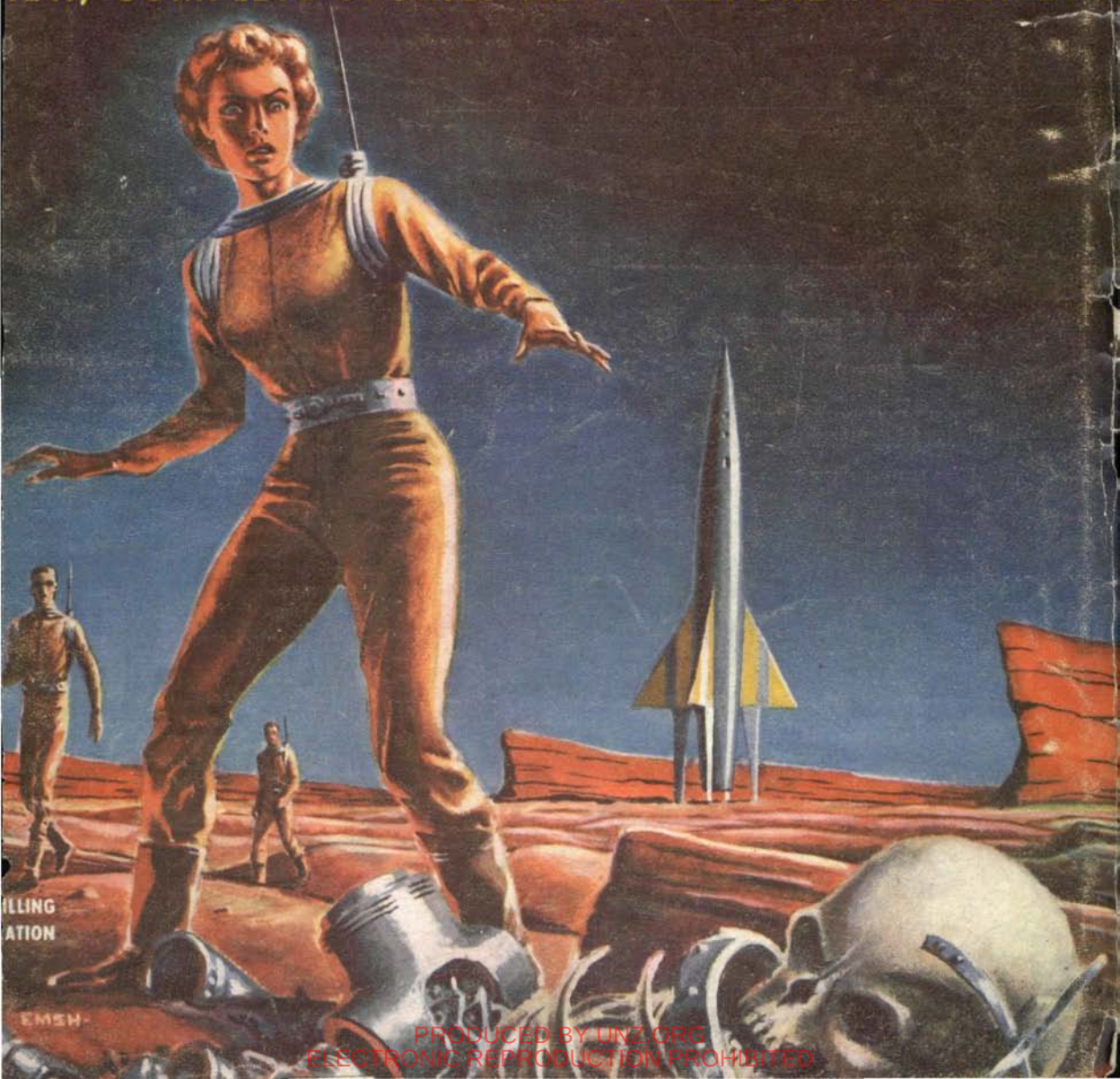

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The makers of POLIDENT offer you Double Your Money Back unless this

Amazing New CREAM Holds Plates Tighter, Longer THAN ANYTHING YOU EVER TRIED

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And that's not all. See if you don't find that Poli-Grip does all these wonderful things for you, too:

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2. . . . hold shallow lowers, despite lack of suction.
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4. . . . enable you to eat hard-to-chew foods in comfort, like steak, apples, celery, even corn-on-the-cob.
5. . . . give you full confidence to laugh, talk, sing without fear of embarrassment due to slipping plates.
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Won't life be wonderful with all these torments behind you? Be sure to be among the first to learn the glorious comfort of holding loose false teeth tight and snug with Poli-Grip! Buy a tube at your drugstore as soon as possible.

Many tried powders, found they failed!

Read what they say about this new way:

"For ten years my teeth wouldn't stay tight for more than two hours a day. I tried powders, but nothing worked till your new *cream*, Poli-Grip, came along."
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"I like the cool taste of Poli-Grip and the smooth way it holds my teeth. It is easy to apply and holds tight for so long."
Mrs. L. W. N., Ottumwa, Iowa

"I found your new cream, Poli-Grip, very pleasant and mild-tasting and it held my loose plates very tight, longer than anything I've tried."
Mrs. H. D. M., Beadentown, Florida

"I like the wonderful holding strength of your new *cream* better than anything I've ever used. I like Poli-Grip's refreshing taste, too."
H. B. V., East Canaan, Conn.

"I definitely prefer Poli-Grip to other products I've tried. It holds my plate tighter and feels comfortable longer. Poli-Grip is cooling, soothing, never gritty."
Mrs. K. L., Los Angeles, Calif.

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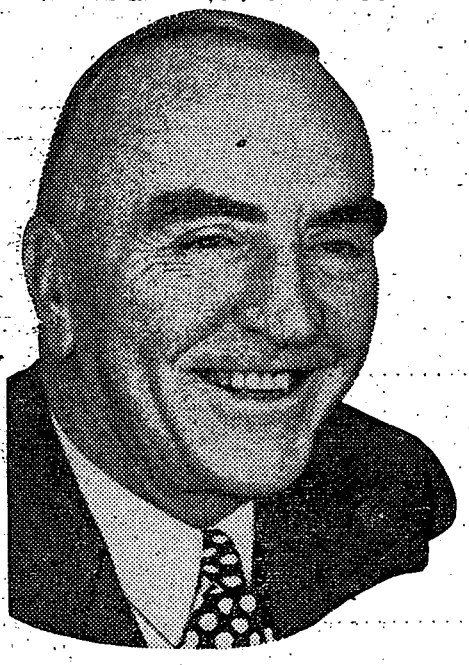

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wonder STORIES

VOL. XL, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION AUGUST, 1952

A NOVEL

LORDS OF THE MORNING ..... Edmond Hamilton 12
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SAMUEL MINES, *Editor* Cover Painting by EMSH

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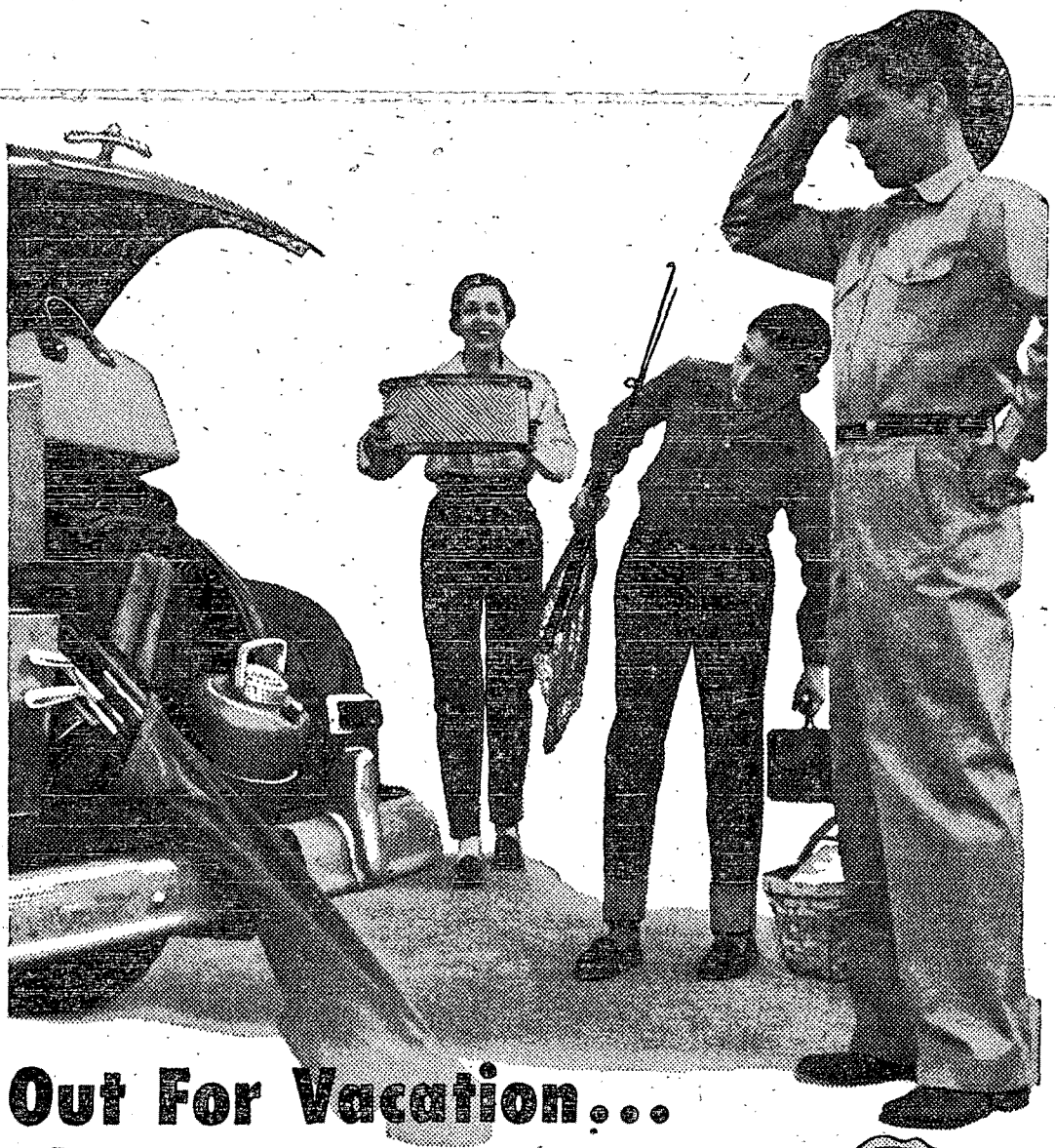

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

WHAT kind of stories do YOU like? The perennial enigma of publishing is public taste. It remains a question mark because no individual, no random sampling, appear to coincide with the likes of a very large group of readers. Public taste is the will-o'-wisp which beckons all publishers and whose apparently erratic gyrations they try to outguess. It is more than likely that there is nothing erratic about it, that the largest common denominator of likes and dislikes follows some natural law which is simplicity itself if we but had the key. Meantime, editors who choose stories can follow any of several systems, all equally unreliable.

They might make surveys or let themselves be influenced by letters from readers or run their own polls or select guinea pigs to report on stories—or they might simply follow their own tastes. It was Emerson who said, to believe in your heart that what is true for you is true for all men, is genius. An editor operating under this system might flop dismally—or succeed, in which case he might well be a genius for all I know. And in the long run it may be the only ultimately practical method an editor can use when all other systems forsake him.

It would seem, therefore, that a good editor is one whose tastes largely agree with those of a majority of his readers.

The Terror of Apathy

It happens now and then that an editor discovers a story which fills his soul with joy and his heart with enthusiasm. He announces his discovery with a fanfare of trumpets and the conviction that he is adding a solid piece of literature to the craftsmanship of the ages.

He expects, of course, that some readers will enthuse over the story as rapturously as himself and that others will hate and detest it with bitterness and venom. But what kills him is the largest reaction of all—sheer apathy. Most readers never notice anything unusual. They accept the story with the same indifference as they accepted the stinkers he has occasionally been forced to print—or accord it the same faint praise. This apathy is more devastating than the wildest reproaches. It takes the fight out of the most leonine blue-penciller, breaking his spirit and reducing him to hiding in dark corners and gnawing his nails, or consuming vast quantities of absinthe in an effort to hasten the onset of paresis.

He should know that there is no universal standard of excellence, that the finest work in the world may fail to move some readers either because they are insensitive to certain stimuli or because it is outside their experience. He jests at scars and all that sort of thing. Among editors no less than readers, some will find the characters and motivations in a story unbelievable, while others will find it poignant, moving and real. The difference is that one group has had similar experience which makes the story ring true to them; the other has not, and there is no emotional reaction. They call it unreal and bad because it is outside *their* reality.

Life Teaches Wisdom

Perhaps this is another example of the truism that literature is no substitute for life. You cannot gain experience from reading; you do not learn from other people's mistakes as you do from your own. Thus you cannot enjoy a good story unless you have some knowledge and experience of life. The road to wisdom does not lie through books alone. Reading offers you an altered picture of life which contains resemblances but which is to be regarded

(Continued on page 8)

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KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

AMENHOTEP IV
Founder of Egypt's
Mystery Schools

This Sealed Book—FREE

Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you A Sealed Book of explanation without obligation. This Sealed Book tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

as no more than a set of theories, some of which might bear testing.

On the other hand fiction sometimes provides us with more entertaining characters than we might get to meet and with whom we would muchly prefer to consort. You might feel like Goethe, who remarked about some people he knew: "If they were books. I would not read them."

Editorially we are far from convinced that fiction must be "significant" to be good. Life contains much monotony and the author who produces pure entertainment, like Wodehouse's *Jeeves* stories, is performing a service to mankind whose value is sadly underestimated. Stories which are disguised sermons are particularly deadly. You do not improve anyone by lecturing him. Boredom sets in early with fatal results. We all know the rules of good behavior so well that we are either going to follow them or not as our personalities lead us. Hammering them home over and over again is going to make no further impression because we stop listening and glaze over. Moreover, people tend to resist anything that is "good for them," just as students resist the doses of Shakespeare which are pumped into them in high school.

The good fiction can do is to widen our knowledge, push back the horizons of our mind, help us get rid of some of our bigotries and expand our open-mindedness. And what could be better for the purpose than science-fiction, which so thoroughly covers all these categories and more?

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

LETTERS?—They're threatening to crowd out all the stories. Look, fellers, make 'em short—pul-lease? I hate to cut them when they're good, but I can't get them all in and somebody's feelings gets damaged. Short—please?

ESPRIT DE CORPSE

by Henry Moskowitz

Mines Dear Sam: Came a pleasant Monday noon; came yours truly to his favorite magazine, etc., store; came me to the magazine racks; came me to the June TWS; came me to page 134; and Came The Dawn. I gagged, staggered to the counter, and paid 25¢. For the June TWS. Natch.

I fear a good deal of this missive will be taken up with a reply to Mr. Harlan Ellison's letter. So, to commence.

Whether in fun or no, Ellison, you shouldn't have written such a thing. We now have two sides of the story, yours and Jerry's. Here's how it happened to me on March 14, 1952.

I walked into the building marked 10 East 40th Street . . . I walked to the bank of elevators, stepped into one, and said, "1400." . . . I walked through the glass door and went over to the receptionist's cubicle. (It was Joan.) "Yes?" she asked, with a smile. "I'd like to see Samuel Mines, please." "Have you an appointment?" "No." "Does he know you?" "Well. Not yet, he doesn't." "Oh! You must read—" "Yup; science-fiction." "Won't you sit down, please?" I sat . . . Bixby walked over, introduced himself, and we shook hands and sat down. "What's your name?" "Moskowitz." "Oh!"

I could keep on, but that isn't the purpose of this letter. So?

Sam Mines isn't a bum, subversive prevaricator, or a maligner. And anyone who says so is all wet!

TWS is not a rag; it's printed on a very good quality paper. Any dope can see that.

I can never see why guys have to open doors; I just walk in.

Once again, an insult. Sam might not be eight feet tall, but anyone who says he isn't human . . . Well, something's loose in his head.

Sure Sam talked. If you were the one to do the talking, Sam would have come out to Cleveland to see you, see?

About trying to get something such as the original painting or an original illo, I know how you feel. I've tried, too. No dice.

Sam isn't Jerry, and Jerry isn't Sam. They are two different guys. Both of them are wonderful, intelligent, handsome, possessing a sense of humor, and easy to get along with.

All in all, if you come to New York again this Summer, drop me a line and I'll try to get in to meet you.

If any of you can find the time, I would advise you to go up and see Sam and Jerry. You'll never know how you'll be received. Think I'll go up myself, again.

Comes to my mind, that I must have been talking to a ghost. If you leaped out the window last Summer, you either fell to your death or froze during the Winter. Too bad; I would very much have liked to meet you. (Sigh!) Hey! I know, Captain Future saved you.

Which brings to that sterling character and a problem. Will Sam print this letter when he sees what comes next, or will he cut part of it out? Anyway, to wit:

Gerald A. Steward wants to know what happened to Captain Future. Two guys in the May SS, Larry Ketcham and myself, want to know, too. Donn O'Neill wants to know in the March SS. He asks why the Captain hasn't appeared between hard covers. I wrote to L. A. Eshbach, of Fantasy and Polaris Presses, asking him. He replied that Frederick Fell had them signed up.

So this is it. Do you want Captain Future

(Continued on page 126)

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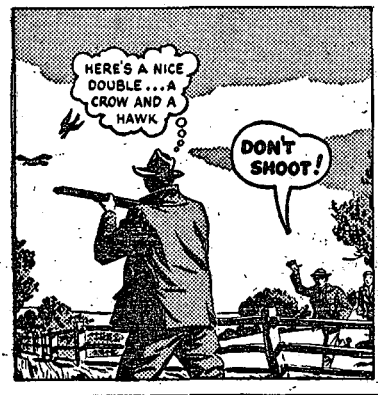
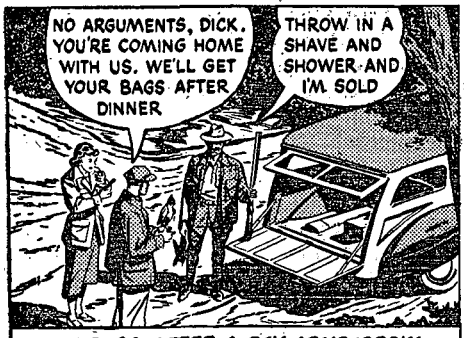
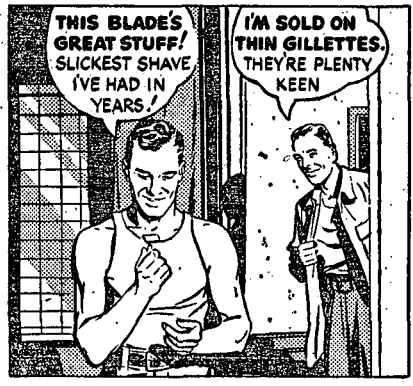
HUNTING HAWK MISSES HIS KILL BUT THEN...

FALCONRY, AN ANCIENT SPORT, STILL SURVIVES AND BEN DAIL IS SHOWING HIS SISTER HOW IT'S DONE





AND SO AFTER A DAY-LONG CROW HUNT WITH HAWK AND GUN...



SO IF YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO'S LOOKING FOR A TURBO-JET EXPERT
WHY, BEN! UNCLE BOB HAS BEEN COMBING THE COUNTRY FOR MEN LIKE DICK
HE'S HANDSOME

MEN, WHEN IT COMES TO EXTRA SHAVING COMFORT, PLUS ECONOMY, YOU CAN'T BEAT THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER AND LAST LONGER THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICE BLADES. YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION, TOO, FOR THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE
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10 25¢
4 10¢
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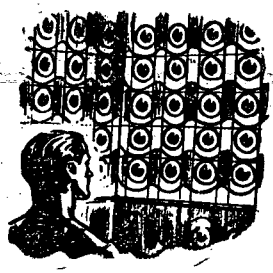
What's New in Science?



THE VACUUM OF SPACE is not as vacuous as you may have supposed. Astronomers estimate that several thousand *tons* of meteor dust rain down upon the earth every day. Each *square inch* of earth is struck by one or two of these particles every day. The little meteors are so tiny that they do not even burn up in their trip through earth's atmosphere. Their composition seems high in nickel, for examination of sea bottoms indicates a much higher percentage of this metal than normal.

LIVE ANIMALS have been sent up in rockets at the Aero Medical Labs at Wright-Patterson Field, Dayton, Ohio. Anesthetized monkeys, falling back to earth, were in that state of suspended gravity which has intrigued every stf writer. The weightless condition did not appear to disturb the test animals at all. No important effects were noted in their circulatory systems or internal organs. Upon the resumption of normal gravity they scampered about and made their usual leaps without discomfort or any indication of being upset.

IF YOU ARE NOW ALIVE you have safely passed the riskiest day of your life. According to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, your first day of life is also your most doubtful. Of course the Met goes by statistics which show that a third of infant deaths of the first year take place the day they are born. 60% of infant deaths occur the first week. Since premature birth is the greatest single factor involved, if the birth is normal the odds are not as great as they might appear.

GIANT ELECTRONIC BRAINS are being used for weather prediction at Princeton. The process has been named "numerical forecasting," because the computer is given thousands of bits of information concerning the weather conditions. The computer then juggles them into mathematical formulae and gives out with a prediction. This process is exactly what has been so often described in science fiction—where the computer is fed bits of data and either comes up with an answer or belches, "insufficient data." No human forecaster could assemble or assimilate the vast amount of scattered information fed into the machine. Up to now, even the electronic brain took a day to work out the answer, so that the technicians could no more than keep up with current weather. But a much larger machine is under construction and is expected to cut the time to as little as half an hour.

A NEW STAR for professional and amateur astronomers to peer at has blossomed out in the southern sky. It is a ninth magnitude nova in the constellation Scorpius. It was discovered by Dr. Guillermo Haro, director of the National Astrophysical Observatory, in Mexico.

ANOTHER LIFE PROCESS has been duplicated in the laboratory. The electro-chemical process of seeing has been achieved by Dr. George Wald, of Harvard. The chemical experimentation necessary has again demonstrated the importance of Vitamin A for good vision and the fact that synthetic vitamins will not do.

THOUGH NO CANCER CURE is in sight, one suggestion has been offered by Dr. Albert Tannenbaum at the Second National Cancer Conference in Cincinnati. Cutting down on calories seemed to reduce the frequency of cancer in mice. This agrees with statistics compiled by the insurance companies for humans, which indicates some correlation between cancer and weight. In general, over-eating and overweight seem to be the twin villains responsible for shortening many a human life.

CLERICAL JOBS will be as obsolete in the world of the future as the one-hoss shay. Electronic brains of every conceivable type are far out of the theoretical stage and are rapidly taking over the routine jobs of business as fast as business-men can afford to buy them. A machine can do any job that does not require imagination or original thinking and a large number of routine jobs in industry are just that. A firm in Brooklyn is already manufacturing "brains for business" and will design a specific machine to do a specific job.

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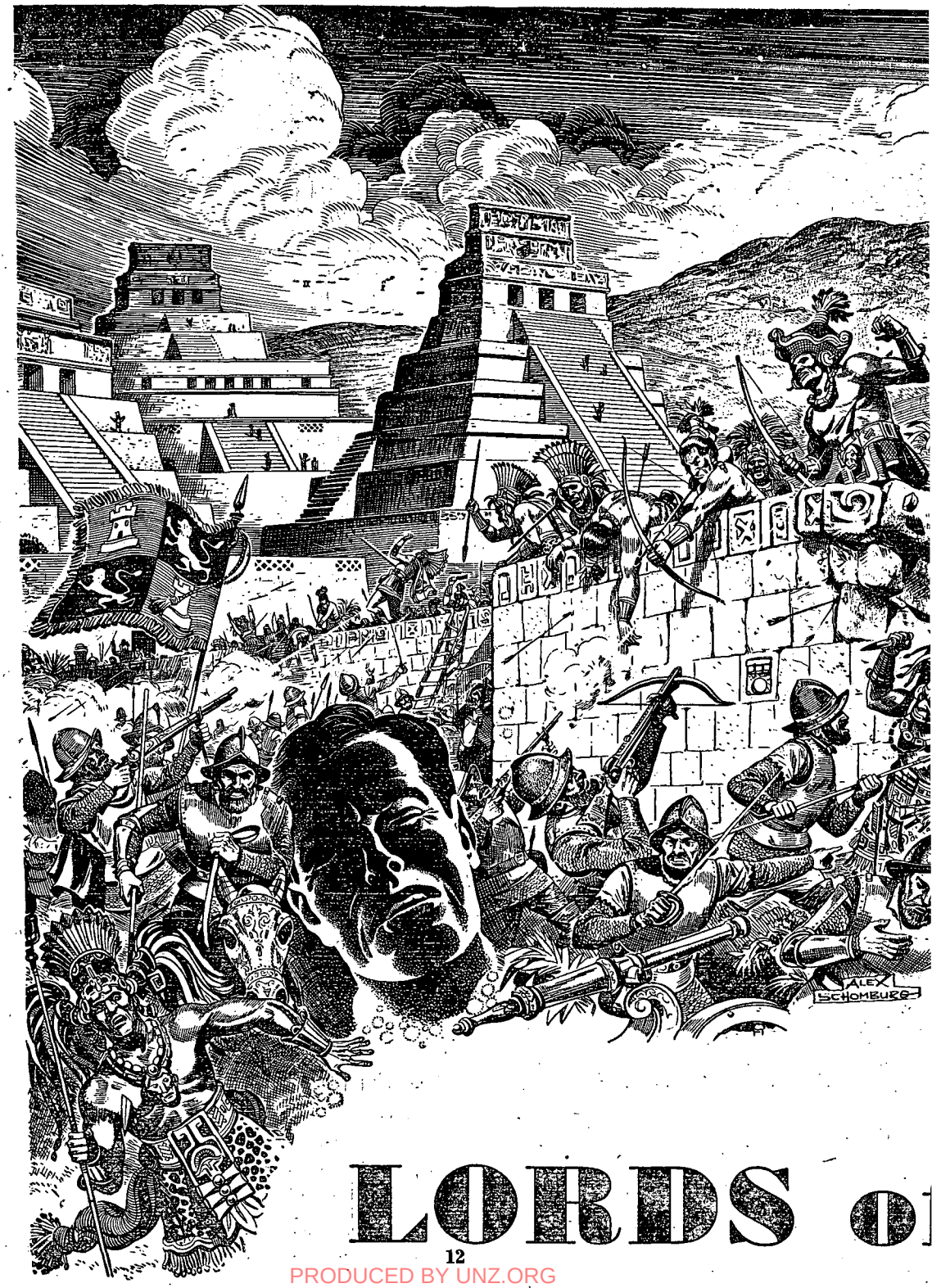

LORDS o

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It was a nightmarish masquerade in time, but Ed Martin tried his best to turn the dream into a reality. . . .

A Novel by EDMOND HAMILTON

the MORNING

I

THE darkness grew and hovered on the edges of his mind. The night sounds of the jungle faded behind it, the smell of wood-smoke, the discomfort of the canvas chair. He called the darkness, drew it in. He had not forgotten how. It lapped at his consciousness with small still wavelets that would swell until they carried him away, and then . . .

Let go. The darkness sings, and is very deep. Let go, and fall. There is light on the other side.

But he could not let go, for now a voice was rudely shattering the spell, a loud voice, insistently calling his name.

"Ed! Ed Martin! What's the matter with you?"

Martin sprang up startled, bathed in sudden sweat. The table edge struck against him. He clung to it, breathing heavily. His eyes were open now, but still blind and clouded with that inner shadow that he had almost evoked before the interruption came.

Farris' voice sounded beside him, loud with angry relief. "Ed, what the devil—"

Very slowly, Martin turned his head.

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The lamp burned. Tropic moonlight poured in through the mosquito-bar that curtained the open door. But still the interior of the hut seemed dim, obscured, and strangely remote.

"I was falling asleep," said Martin, stumblingly. "That's all."

"No," said Farris. "No, you weren't. There was something else in your face. I don't know what."

Martin sat down, feeling weak and shaken. It had been a long time since he had tried to do that thing. And to interrupted, snatched back— He would not look up at Farris.

His gaze fell on the papers spread out on the table, the painful translation, finished only yesterday, of the Mayan symbols of the stela they had unearthed—the most puzzling find, so far, of the expedition. It was that maddeningly cryptic inscription that had finally led him to break his old resolution, and try the thing he had tried.

ALL the Mayan civilization, all the mighty wrecked cities of stone that lay about them here in the Guatemalan jungle, were a riddle of history. But this newfound inscription, these puzzling references to "the Lords of the Morning who taught our fathers wisdom"—this had so sharpened the riddle that he had been able to bear it no longer, and had set his feet again upon a road that he had long ago renounced.

He looked up at Farris, and saw the wonder and doubt and slight shrinking in Farris' homely face, and he realized then that he couldn't fob off his fellow archaeologist with thin explanations.

"You looked," Farris said, "as though you were under some kind of self-hypnosis. Yet different . . ."

Martin laughed. It was a small laugh, and not pleasant.

"All right, I'll tell you. I've told a few people before. But they didn't believe. You won't."

Farris said nothing, but waited.

"Do you think it possible for the mind to leave the body?" Martin asked him abruptly, seeing Farris' uneasiness.

"It depends on what you mean by 'the mind.'"

"I mean," Martin said, "that elusive nexus of electrical force called, for want of a better term, the consciousness. The me, the you."

Farris looked more uneasy. "I don't know much about all this new parapsychology. What are you getting at, Ed?"

Martin looked out into the moonlight. He was tired, and sorry now that he had tried to explain, but he had to go on.

"I had dreams, when I was a youngster," he said. "I'd seem to fall through darkness and then, for a brief time, I'd be looking through someone else's eyes. Sometimes for only a moment. But the things I saw were very queer and outlandish. It was only later, when I began to read and learn history, that I found I'd seen things of the past."

He brooded for a moment. "I still thought they were only dreams. But they were too vivid, too real, too authentic, the things I saw. Finally I began to realize that I possessed a certain psychic something—talent, or weakness, I don't know which."

He looked up. "That's why I became an archaeologist, Farris. The glimpses of the past I'd had—they made me want to know all about it."

Farris was elaborately casual as he asked, "You thought your mind or consciousness had drifted out of your body for a moment—into some other body in the past?"

"Yes. I thought so. I think so. Something set it free, to fall back along the world-lines, to peep at dead centuries through the eyes of other men, a guest inside a foreign brain. A fleeting guest, coming and going swiftly. That's the hell of it, you can't stay as long as you want any more than you can pick exactly where you're going to go."

"The Tibetans," Farris told him, "claim that some of their monks can do that. They call it the Seeking Forth."

Martin nodded. "I know. There are other traditions. I don't think it often

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happens that a man has the talent."

"Tell me, Ed, did you ever go to a psychologist about it?"

"Yes, to several. I went into it at some length with the psychological research man, Cavendish."

"What did he think?"

Martin shrugged. "He said it was either delusion, or a real wild talent similar to ESP. If delusion, I shouldn't do it any more. If it was real, then I positively mustn't try it again."

"It's dangerous, Martin. We don't know what the stresses are, we don't know what repeated invasions of other mind-matrices might do to this delicate web of impulses we call the individual consciousness. . . ."

Danger, Martin. Let it be!

FARRIS was staring at him. "Did you follow his advice?"

"Yes," Martin said. "I've let it be, in the two years since I saw Cavendish. But now—"

His gaze wandered to the pages of translation, and Farris caught his look.

"Then it was that stela that set you off again?"

"Yes, in a way. Those references to 'the wise ones, the Lords of the Morning'—they deepen the whole mystery of the Maya."

And Martin went on, almost passionately, "It's still all mystery—you know that! One Indian people suddenly developing, apparently spontaneously, into a race of architects, mathematicians, astronomers! Devising an accurate calendar a thousand years before Christendom did, calculating perfectly the synodic year of Venus, building splendid, sculptured cities. Why did they suddenly develop like that? Why?"

Farris said, "We'll find the answer to your 'why' one of these days?"

"Will we? We've grubbed in these ruins for decades, and the mystery only deepens. But if I could get even a moment's glimpse, across time. . . ."

He looked up then and saw the expression on Farris' face. He stopped, and then after a moment he laughed mirthlessly.

"All right, Farris. Go ahead and say what you think."

"I think you've worked too hard, Ed," Farris said carefully. "I think you need a vacation from archaeology, for a while."

"In other words, I and my time-dreams are crazy."

"I didn't say that! And I don't think it! I'm no hidebound 19th Century scientific dogmatist, and I know perfectly well that Rhine and the parapsychology lads have discovered some queer powers. But this. . . ."

He paused, choosing his words very carefully indeed. "We all have uncanny moments of remembrance, Ed. Why, the very act of memory is a form of mental

Brighter Tomorrow

LONG-time fans still remember Ed Hamilton tenderly for the Captain Future stories, which were big-time space opera in their day. But if Ed Hamilton cut his teeth on space opera, as did most of us Gernsback graduates, it was the best of all possible preparations for the wider understanding of science fiction necessary today. No writer could handle space opera successfully without developing his powers of visualization to the utmost. And from this springs clear compelling, crisp writing which never bogs itself down in mere words.

We've bought some new stories by Hamilton, and the new Hamilton is a surer, wiser, more skillful craftsman than the old. If you enjoy local color, dip into LORDS OF THE MORNING and feel its magic.

—The Editor

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time-travel, of projecting one's mind back into the past. But I think a man can dwell too much on those queer moments of vision. Right now, this Maya puzzle has you overstrained. I'd go to bed and forget it."

He added anxiously, "And for Pete's sake don't go talking about it to our Indians, or they'll be hightailing it out of here in superstitious panic."

Martin said bitterly, "I'm not that crazy."

He regretted now that he had said anything at all. He should have learned not to do so, for people always reacted like this—everyone except a few psychologists who knew enough about the mind to be not too sure.

He said, "Oh, all right," and went over and lay down on his cot, pulling the mosquito-bar tight. "Satisfied? Good night."

Farris lingered hesitantly for a moment. "You know, Ed, I wasn't trying to imply you're nuts."

"Oh, sure, I know that."

"Well, then, good night."

"Farris . . ."

"What?"

"I *can* do it, you know."

Farris looked down at him, and seemed to be trying to think of something to say to that. Then he turned and went out.

IN THE humid darkness Martin lay and wished again that he'd kept his mouth shut. From the time he was a kid and had told the other youngsters the things he "saw", the reaction was always the same.

Maybe they were right, at that? Maybe it was just a form of self-hypnosis that didn't mean anything?

"I'm damned if that's so," he muttered. "I could go back—I could still go back." Only for an instant, maybe—but even a moment's glimpse of the old Mayan civilization might solve the mystery of a lost world.

Desire to do it took him by the throat again. The insidious, subtle temptation of the singing darkness beyond which lay incredible moments of phenomenal vision. . . .

He groaned to himself. "Why the devil did I have to be cursed with this thing anyway? It's warped my whole life—"

It had done that, had turned his life irrevocably toward the dusty past. While other men lived in the present or looked toward the future, toward great conquests of space and matter, he had spent his years in obsessed study of Earth's dead ages and their riddles.

And this Mayan riddle—the greatest and most mocking of all. If he could just see for a moment, if he could let go and fall back beyond the black veil as he had used to do, back beyond the darkness . . . .

And even now the darkness was rising in his mind, as it used to rise, whelming him again, carrying him!

Martin felt a throb of mixed panic and eagerness, as he dimly realized that he had thought too long about it, that he had started to let go. He must not let go, he mustn't go back. Danger!

But it was too late, he was going, drifting down the dark tide, the half-quiescent consciousness of Edward Martin separating cleanly from the brain-cells it inhabited, an immaterial web of force moving down unfamiliar dimensions, just as he had done before . . . .

The pace, or sense of it, increased. It was as though some impalpable current had caught him, hurling him faster and faster through nothingness. A vague pulse of alarm beat through his mind. It had never happened with such a rush before. Something was wrong . . . .

Wrong! The terrible swift current plunged on, rushing in utter silence from darkness unto dark, bearing him with it. He tried now to fight it but he did not know how. He sensed a danger, a destruction, from which his mind could not escape, and he remembered briefly all the warnings.

Impact! A sudden unguessed, shattering anguish, through which the stunned electrons whirled like a firmament of

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shooting stars. And after that there was not even the memory of fear.

II

MARTIN became distantly aware that someone was shaking him. Bodily, corporeally shaking him. He could feel fingers biting into a physical shoulder, and far away somewhere there were voices calling. He was safe, then. He was back lying in his own bunk, and

ARYLL

Farris was there, trying to waken him.

Reaction more violent than the terror that inspired it set him to retching, and he tried to get up. And then, quite normally, he fainted.

Again the shaking, and the urgent voices. Martin groaned. A basketful of warm and evil-smelling water hit him in the face. He coughed and strangled, fighting his way up to a sitting position. Sense and hearing came back to him. He blinked to clear his blurring vision, and wondered why there were drums beating, and why there was so much shouting. Something must have happened in the camp . . . .

"Farris," he gasped. "Farris!"

A face appeared. A thing of mist and wavering outlines that slowly, slowly cleared and took shape. A bearded face, bronzed, predatory, sallow with old fevers, and topped by a battered steel cap. Two black, bloodshot eyes peered closely into his.

"Farris?" Martin whispered, and was still. His heart began to beat with a dull hard thudding.

"Pedro!" cried the face. "Pedro, wake up!" It spoke in Spanish. Hands like the paws of a bear reached out and shook Martin, not unkindly, until his teeth rattled. "Do you hear me, Pedro? In an hour we march!"

Martin stared at the bearded man with the steel cap and the seamy cheeks. Then he turned his head. There was another man beside him, leaning over, but it was not either Farris or anyone he knew, and he was not in his shack by the digging, and there were many people shouting above the rattle of the drums . . . .

He found his tongue and screamed. A great horny palm was thrust over his mouth. He bit and tore it and it went away, to return at once, quite hard, against the side of his head. He subsided, and the voice of the bearded man said, "Fever madness." There followed curses, and then a worried, "What are we to do, Manrique?"

A second voice, soft and smooth and relentless. "He's got to march! Try the water again, Herrera. Then hold him tight and let me talk. Perhaps I can soothe him down."

Again the slosh of brackish water, the involuntary gasp and choke. Martin struggled, but his arms were caught in a grasp that two Martins could not have broken. He looked up, trembling, his eyes dazed and feral.

The man called Manrique was before him now. He was narrow and light where Herrera was broad and heavy. His face, too, was sallow and bony and sun-bitten, but the beard upon it was neatly trimmed and the eyes were intelligent, with a kind of melancholy humor.

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"Pedro," he said softly. "Hearken, amigo. You must get up and come with us. We are to go with Hernando de Chaves, and Alvarado himself leaves this place tomorrow, so that if you do not come you will be left with the other sick men to the tender mercies of the Indios. Do you understand?"

"B-rroom!" rattled the drums. *"B-rroom-boom!"*

Martin tried three times before the words would come. "No," he whispered. "I—don't understand anything. Who are you?"

He spoke in Spanish, because they did. Behind him, Herrera groaned. "By Huitzlpotchli's bloody chin! Who are we, indeed! The sickness has eaten up his wits."

Manrique said, in the soothing tone one uses to a frightened animal, "Two days ago you took a sunstroke. You have lain like a dead man ever since, and we thought we would have to leave you behind. Then at dawn this morning you gave a leap and a cry, and we have labored over you for nigh three hours." He put his hand on Martin's shoulder. "Now you must get up and march, and not show that you are sick. Otherwise you will stay here, and die."

Martin looked beyond Manrique. He felt strange and giddy, like a man falling between two dreams. The country was no different from the country he had—left. The same jungle, the same background of lofty mountains, the same heat and smells. There was a typical Indian village of thatched huts, with cleared land around it for the corn. It looked like any of a hundred such villages he had seen, and he felt he should be able to find his way easily from here back to his own camp . . . .

THERE were soldiers in the village. Soldiers like Manrique and Herrera, bearded men in caps and morions, in breastplates of dented steel and armor of quilted cotton, in boots and cloaks and antique breeches. They carried swords, and pikes, and crossbows, and a few had arquebuses, and there were horses with high-bowed saddles, and bridles ringed with silver. There was a gallant roar of curses, shouts, and laughter, a neighing and a stamping. The drums pounded, somewhere a trumpet blared, and there was a beautiful underlying sound like cymbals striking—the clash of arms and mail.

Soldiers of Spain. The men and horses out of Spain, and the banners, the bright Toledo blades and the Moorish saddles. Soldiers of Spain, and a man called Alvarado.

Martin laughed. The digging and the camp were not so far away in space, but something more than four centuries away in time. He knew his history of Guatemala. He knew where he was, and when. He laughed again, and Manrique stopped him, not without some effort.

Another thought had occurred to Martin, the inevitable thought, and the worst. He considered it, keeping his eyes resolutely fixed on the confusion of the village. Off to one side, apart from the Spaniards, was a second encampment of perhaps a thousand men. These were Indians, but of a different breed from the stocky villagers, tall, fierce-eyed, and well-armed. "Those would be the Tlascalans," Martin thought irrelevantly. The levies out of Mexico.

He said aloud, very carefully, like a child repeating a lesson, "I have had a sunstroke. For two days my mind was —dead."

Manrique nodded. "That is so."

"And," said Martin, "you know me."

Behind him, Herrera groaned. "From Estremadura we came together, *compadres,* and fought under Cortes all the way from Cuba to Tenochtitlan. And he enquires if we know him! Pedro, Pedro, what has happened to you?"

Manrique touched his temple. "It is the sun." He smiled at Martin. "It will all return to you in a day or so. Now get up, and I will help you with your gear."

"Wait," said Martin. "No, you can let me go, Herrera, I am calm now." He shut his eyes tight, drew a long breath,

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and steeled himself. "What is my name?"

Manrique sighed. "Yanez," he said. "Pedro Yanez."

"Pedro Yanez," Martin whispered. *Pedro Yanez had a sunstroke, and Edward Martin went adventuring in time. One mind perished, broken and shattered by the sun, leaving an empty body, and another mind came rushing out of time, sucked into the vacuum, caught and trapped—and the body of Pedro Yanez gave a sudden leap and cry . . . .*

Martin opened his eyes and looked down at himself.

A pair of hands, very gaunt and strong, with a white scar across the back of one. Long legs cased in boots of leather worn to shreds by many marches, and above them a lean and unfamiliar body dressed in tattered breeches and a leather shirt rubbed through where the steel had chafed it.

He put up those strange scarred hands and covered his face with them. He felt the curved hawk nose and the long arrogant jaw. He felt the beard that covered his chin, and the places above the temples where the steel cap had worn the hair away. He began to weep, slow tears of utter desolation.

The trumpet called, a shrill imperious blast. The drums beat faster. The men began to form ranks, the horsemen mounted. "Come, Pedro!" cried Manrique. "Come!"

But Martin sat upon the ground and wept.

HERRERA reached down, took him in both hands, and set him on his feet. He held him there while Manrique buckled on his back-and-breast of battered steel, and the belt with the long sword. Together they set the steel cap on his head and the sharp pike in his hand and marched him off, holding him erect, and Martin stumbled where they took him, his face blank as a dead man's.

Through a curious haze, in which sounds and colors were dimmed as though by distance, he saw the long line of men begin to move, with the horses and the banners on before. He was part of that line. He heard the trumpet and the drums, and the muted muffled thunder as the soft-shod Indian troops formed up behind. There was an acrid smell of dust, and from a distance the villagers watched, sullen, fearful, full of hate.

A man in rich armor came out of a tent. He had red-gold hair and a beard that flamed in the sun. The Tlascalans lifted up their spears and called him *"Tonatiuh!"*, and the Spaniards cheered. In his left hand he held a half-gnawed fowl, but he saluted them with the other, laughing, and shouted to them.

"Stop it, you scoundrels! There's gold and women waiting for you at Copan!"

Herrera muttered darkly, "There was gold and women at Tenochtitlan, but did we ever touch them? No! It was Cortes and his captains got them, not we 'scoundrels' of the line. It'll be the same at Copan!"

The men within hearing growled assent. But they stopped it—half of Alvarado's forces, one hundred and fifty men-at-arms, forty horsemen, five hundred Indians of Tlascala and Tenochtitlan, and four little cannon drawn by hand, going to conquer an empire.

Boom—b-rroom! pulsed the drums, and they marched eastward across the cornlands and into the green jungle, with the morning sun glaring in their faces. And Martin marched with them, a dazed, half-conscious man, a stranger out of time caught in another man's flesh. And it was a nightmare, but it was real . . . .

He forced a question from between dry lips. "The place he spoke of—the place we're going to—he said *Copan?*"

Manrique answered. "That's the place. A rich city, they say. Maybe another Tenochtitlan, eh, lad? And this time the loot will stick to *our* fingers!"

"Copan," Martin whispered. He knew Copan. He had stood upon the Jaguar Stair, and followed the line of the ruined acropolis along the river, and studied

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every stone of the great temple-pyramid of Venus. Copan, that mightiest of old Mayan cities, lost and forgotten for centuries with the Empire that had built it. So long lost and so well forgotten, that Martin had not credited Stephen's account of an expedition under one Hernando de Chaves that attacked a rich and living Copan early in the Sixteenth Century.

Now he would know. He was marching with Hernando de Chaves. He would see for himself whether Copan was alive or dead. And what did it matter to him now? What difference would archaeological research make in the life of Pedro Yanez, soldier of Spain? He was marching with Chaves. The sun was hot, and he was trapped in alien flesh. And there was no way back, ever again.

III

MANRIQUE paused to wipe the sweat from his eyes. "They fight like fiends, these Copanes!" he grunted. "May their patron, the Devil, fly away with them all!"

The battle was still going on. All day yesterday, from dawn to sunset, the Spaniards had assailed the walls, and the men of Copan had driven them back. This day at sunrise it had begun again, and things were no different, except that there were fewer Spaniards.

To Martin, this slaughter on the walls of Copan was only a part of the dream that had began some two weeks before. He could not, somehow, take it seriously. He supposed that it would take some time—if he lived, which seemed doubtful—for his mind to adjust completely to a totally new set of realities.

The long march from Guatemala had saved his reason. The agonies of heat, exhaustion, thirst, and hunger had taken his attention from himself and concentrated it upon the primal necessities of survival. Now, a soldier of Chaves engaged in trying to take a city which did not belong to him, he was able to behave almost as though he believed it.

He had clung to the fiction of sunstroke and resultant amnesia, and his comrades had grown accustomed to his lapses of knowledge, which were as few as a tight-reined tongue could make them. But a portion of his mind was still hiding from itself, pretending hard that all this was not really so.

Sheer folly, that, and Martin knew it, but he could not help it. He heard the shrill whine of arrows past him. He smelled blood, and his eardrums flinched from the screaming of a wounded horse and the somehow less shocking cries of men. There were bodies on the ground, and in the deep fosse, and under the great stone wall. The men of Copan wore cotton armor and helmets of brilliant feathers, and their swords were of wood fanged with razor-sharp obsidian. Martin knew that he might be the next to find his death there, and still he could not quite believe . . . .

Herrera was yelling at him, and Manrique. "Fall back, *compadres!* Nothing is to be done here now!"

They fell back. Spaniards and Tlascalans began to straggle away from the wall, and a great shout went up from Copan. Out of bow-shot they stopped, while the officers swore and sweated, regrouping, and the men looked with hungry eyes upon the city that remained stubbornly beyond their grasp.

Martin leaned on his pike and looked also, and it was the city more than anything that made this battle seem a dream.

ALREADY the suns and rains of more than a thousand years had beaten down upon it. Here and there the stone had crumbled, or some unneeded suburb had been claimed again by the greedy jungle, and the colors were all softened, the surfaces mellowed by the passing of centuries. But it was alive, and whole. The lofty temples and the palaces, the mighty stairways and the courts, the monuments, the carvings, only a little broken now, beautiful with age but still used and useful, still glowing with the

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lost enamels that had made the sombre stone-like jewels. . . .

"Like nothing on Earth," Martin murmured, and shivered between wonder and fear. *I cannot be seeing this, and yet I am. What curious shapes they have, those temple pyramids! A skyline from another world.*

The trumpet squealed furiously, calling for another charge. The little cannon that had been banging valiantly away at a crumbled part of the wall fell silent. The weather-stained banners snapped and moved, and there was a shout of "Santiago!", and the men and horses thundered again toward the wall.

Martin laughed, just a little madly, that this improbable thing should seem to be happening. He had nothing against the Copanes, and no desire to kill anyone, even in a dream. But the press of men bore him across the fosse and up against the wall. He could see the dark wild faces of the bowmen, crowned with bright feathers, and could hear their arrows like rain while the Spanish crossbars whirred.

Then the horses made it across the ditch and burst through and over the weakened portion of the wall. The Copanes gave back in terror before these foaming, squealing monsters that danced on great hoofs shod with iron and that had two heads and bodies, one beast, one human. Like the Aztecs, they had never seen a horse.

Behind the *caballeros* poured the men at arms and the yelling Tlascalans, carrying Martin along with them into the city. After that what happened in Copan was only a repetition of the things that had happened in all the cities of Mexico.

There swirled around Martin a packed, howling mass of men, a kaleidoscope of colors, of broad streets, houses, terraces, porticoes. He was aware of Manrique and Herrera fighting near him in a kind of methodical frenzy and he yelled and waved his own weapons to keep up the semblance of the masquerade.

Then began a dance of devils in a dying city, as the Copanes gave back and crumbled and died. Martin began to feel sick. He glimpsed a feathered warrior coming at him, and saw the wicked glitter of obsidian teeth along the wooden sword-edge, and raised his pike in a futile gesture. Manrique ran the Maya through with a neat thrust and return, and vaulted over the writhing body.

"The fighting is about over," he panted. "Let us see to the loot."

The battle was dying down into a few hopeless little last-stand combats, with most of the Copanes in full flight, harried by the fearsome horsemen who hunted them up and down the ringing streets. Looting parties were already breaking off from the main Spanish force.

Manrique and Herrera swept the half-dazed Martin along with them. They went like eager wolves through the splendid, empty courts, paying no attention to straggling fugitives as they headed for the taller temples.

"Only a little battle," Martin was thinking. "It wouldn't even leave a mark on history. But when you see it—when you hear men dying . . . ."

HE WAS feeling very sick indeed. Herrera swore at his laggardness, and the two hurried on without him, avid to be first in the sack of the temples.

Martin stopped and numbly looked around at the terraces and pyramids that rose in a twelve-acre mass of masonry, a thunderous monument to a strange culture. The curious, fantastic shapes reared up like sculptured mountains out of some other world.

And then, on a stone stairway that climbed toward a little columned temple, he saw the girl.

There were Mayan women around her, crouching and sobbing as though seeking protection from her. But she was not one of them. She wore a tunic of a deep, strange green, and she was young and beautifully made, and something in the

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way she held herself told him that she was not afraid.

He started up the stair, and as he went up the stone steps he had eyes only for the girl. He saw now that her skin was golden, a pure bright color entirely apart from the coppery hue of the Mayas. She wore around her neck an unknown symbol of great jewels, set in some white metal.

"—Copan has fallen!" one of the Mayan women was sobbing to her. "Lady Aryll, why? Why have the Lords of the Morning permitted this to happen? Have we sinned?"

"There has been no sin," came the voice of the girl called Aryll. She spoke the Quiche tongue, but with a softness of accent and a great bitterness. "There has been only blind stupidity."

Martin stopped short, startled. Of a sudden, for a heartbeat, he was back with Farris in another time, puzzling over that enigmatic stela.

"*. . . the Lords of the Morning who wielded the powers of the gods. . . .*"

In that moment, the girl turned and saw him.

She looked down at him, with no fear but with a cold contempt. He saw now that her hair was dark and soft, full of fleeting glints where the sunlight struck it, curling at the ends. No Indian had ever hair like that, or eyes that were the color of mist over a green sea. Where had she come from, with her golden skin and strange dress? Was she remnant of some ancient race long drowned in the stream of history?

The Mayan women followed her gaze, and looked down the stair, and screamed. The horror of that scream, and the way in which the women recoiled, made Martin see himself the way they saw him—a grim, alien invader coming up the stair with a naked sword in his hand.

"Lady Aryll!" one cried despairingly, and then as though hopeless of any intervention, they fled.

But the girl Aryll did not move. She faced Martin levelly and the cold scorn in her gaze cut him.

"So our folly has found us out at last," she said, in an odd low voice. Her gaze lifted, where the smoke was rising thick above the burning roofs of Copan. "So it ends, in blood and violence. So it has always been."

She made a sharp gesture of negation. Those strange mist-green eyes rested once more on the man in armor who stood below her on the steps. Then she turned her back on him, mounting toward the temple.

"Wait," cried Martin, in the Quiche dialect she had used. He sprang after her up the worn stones. There were so many questions he wanted to ask her, but there was no time. The shouts and screaming in the streets were drawing closer. He put his hand on her shoulder, with some vague idea of leading her away to safety.

She turned under his grasp, her lips drawn back, her eyes blazing. His fingers tightened. Her flesh was warm and tremendously alive. The sudden thought crossed Martin's mind, *I am no longer Edward Martin, I am Pedro Yanez until I die. Why shouldn't I act like him? There's little enough pleasure in this stinking life . . . .*

She was amazingly strong. She struck his hand away and stepped back. Martin laughed. Each soldier was entitled to his portion of the loot. He didn't have to let her go.

She hated him. The hate showed in her like white fire. But still she was not afraid, and still she was contemptuous of him and all he stood for. A spark of anger flared up in Martin. Who was she, a barbarian woman of a dying culture, to regard him with such disdain?

He started for her in earnest. And all at once she had something in her hand, a small silvery object that she had drawn from a fold of her tunic. Martin stopped, all else forgotten in stunned amazement.

Chrome steel, in this century? Perfect machining, in a culture that worked no metal? Intricate lenses, in a land where glass was undreamed of?

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A flash of violet light leaped out at him

He opened his mouth to speak. A flash of violet light leaped out from the clustered lenses, blinding, bright. A terrific shock ran through him, and every motor nerve center went dead. Blinded and utterly astonished he collapsed on the steps.

When he came to, the girl was gone.

IV

THE hours of sack and pillage had rolled over Copan. The fires had burned themselves out. The carved jades and feather mantles were heaped high and crowned with the emerald-studded panache of the king, and Hernando de Chaves scowled at them, and swore.

"Have we come all this way for a pile of feathers and a few trinkets of stone?" he demanded. "Where is the gold? In all this stinking city, isn't there so much as a handful of gold?"

They were in the courtyard of the king's palace, where the unhappy Copan Calèl was hostage for the good behaviour of his people. It was easily defended in case of trouble, and here the Spaniards had taken up their quarters. The men-at-arms and the *caballeros* alike regarded the great mound of loot with furious disappointment.

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"They have hidden their gold," said Herrera. He had already tortured three or four men without success, but he clung to the idea stubbornly. "They can be made to tell where they have hidden it."

Chaves shook his head. "The king swears they have none, nor any other metal, either. They couldn't have hidden it all. They couldn't have hidden their forges and killed all their smiths. They couldn't have stripped off every ornament." He kicked with his dusty boot at a robe of quetzal feathers. "No. There isn't any gold. There's only this—this flummery!" He kicked again.

Martin could have told him that, but he knew better. He could have told them other things—about a golden girl who was not of Copan, and who carried an electronic shocker that paralyzed the nerve centers, a thing that would have astounded the scientists of his own day. But he knew better than that, too.

He clung to the shadows in a far corner of the court and brooded about the girl. The memory of that incredible mechanism she had used tormented him beyond endurance. Who had made it, where had it come from and how had she gotten hold of it? In this day, when modern science, even in the most advanced courts of Europe, was still only a new-born babe accused of witchcraft, the existence of such a thing was sheerly impossible. And yet he had seen it with his eyes, felt the effects of it with his body. It was real, which meant that somewhere there was a science and a technology capable of creating it.

But where? And whose? And why had history made no mention of it? The questions went round and round inside his head with no answers to them. Only the girl could answer them, and she was gone. He had hunted for her, through the streets of Copan. He had seen a lot of things, most of them sickening, but not the girl. He had even haunted the slave pens, where the captive women were being rounded up, but she had disappeared.

PERHAPS he had dreamed her and her incredible weapon. Reality had become insane, and there was no reason why insanity could not therefore become real. He himself was an impossibility, living in a phantom world, and why not. . . .

There was a sudden uproar at the far end of the court. Martin turned his head, craning over the shoulders of the men in front of him, and there she was, the golden girl in her dark green tunic, with the great jewels blazing on her throat. She was the center of a knot of Spaniards, two of whom held her strongly by the arms. If she still had her shocker, she must have realized the futility of using it against an army. She walked erect between her captors, enduring them patiently, but with a look in her mist-green eyes and around her mouth that would have made lesser men cringe. Martin's heart turned over with a throb of excitement that almost choked him.

They brought her up to Chaves. "We caught her trying to get out of the city," one of the men said. "She had a very fancy litter, and a lot of Indios with her." He grinned. "There was a little trouble. But we thought you would want to talk to her." He paused and looked at the magnificent gems that burned on her throat. "Especially about those," he added, and then sent a challenging glare around the circle of avid faces. "Remember who it was that brought her in! Me, Manuel Diaz!"

Martin had forgotten everything but the girl. He forced his way through the men who were clustering round her, asking questions she did not understand, shouting for interpreters. He stood in front of her and cried out in the Quiche tongue:

"Be careful what you do! Do you know these men? They'd murder their own mother for those jewels!"

He was not thinking really about her, her safety or her possessions. He was thinking of the knowledge that she had that he might not be able to get out of her now, since the Spaniards had her.

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At the very least, Chaves would claim her and he would not see her again.

She glanced at him, and her lips twisted. "Oh, yes," she said. "The man with the naked sword."

He felt again, in memory, the flash and shock that had ended their first meeting. "Listen," he said. "That—" There were no words in the Quiche that had anything to do with electronics. Thing-that-spits-lightning was the best he could do. "Where did you get it? Who made it? You've got to tell me, before they . . ."

His voice petered out into a dead silence. The Spaniards were staring at him now, and he realized that he had made a bad mistake. Edward Martin the archaeologist was fluent in the Mayan dialect, but Pedro Yanez the soldier of Spain could not possibly have known it. For that reason, and several others, Martin had kept his mouth shut, even though all negotiations had had to be carried on through two interpreters, Quiche into Tlascalan, Tlascalan into Spanish. Now he had betrayed himself, and Manrique especially was regarding him with suspicious wonder.

"Well," said Chaves. "What a pity that our knowledgeable Yanez concealed his wisdom all this time, when it would have been so useful to us."

"I—I speak the language badly," Martin stammered. "Very badly indeed. In fact, I—" He brightened a bit, laughing. "I learned what little I know from a slave girl who had been a captive among these people, and she—well, she was a very young and pretty slave girl, and we didn't need many phrases to get by."

He leered, and the men laughed. Only Manrique's face did not relax.

Chaves nodded at Aryll. "She doesn't seem the sort to try your phrases on! Can you ask her where she got the jewels?"

"I'll try." Turning to Aryll, he said rapidly, "They will take everything you have of value. I'll do all I can to help you—but you must tell where the jewels came from!"

"So it is the stones you want?" she said. She looked at Chaves and the others, a long, contemptuous look. Then she reached up and loosened the chain around her neck, and flung the jewels at Chaves' feet.

The Spaniard's cheeks flushed darkly. He started forward, his hand raised as though to strike her, to beat her to her proud knees and make her learn the proper etiquette between master and slave. Something in her eyes restrained him. He stooped instead and swept up the strange bright symbol, weighing it in his hand. His mouth was suddenly cruel.

"Ask her where these came from, Yanez."

He asked her, and added, "If you don't tell, they'll torture you."

She said slowly, "For hours I have watched, from a secret place. I have seen what they have done in Copan. I am not afraid of what they can do to me."

Martin had to translate that, and he saw Chaves redden with avarice and rage. His fingers caressed the glowing stones. "We were cheated in Copan, but by Santiago, if we could sack the place *these* come from, we could pave Madrid with gold! We must find out!"

"A little torture will find out for us," suggested Manuel Diaz, eagerly.

Chaves shook his head. "Not with this one. I think she'll be valuable to us. But there are those Indios bearers of hers you captured. See what you can do with them."

DIAZ went away avidly. Martin felt sick when he heard a shrill scream outside the camp.

But, only a few minutes later, Diaz was back with a young Mayan boy who was trembling violently and whose dark face was dazed with pain.

"These people are soft," Diaz said, grinning. "He'll answer questions, now."

"Ask him, Yanez!" ordered the commander.

Martin asked the trembling boy. The

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boy seemed to avoid Aryll's gaze, as he replied.

"She comes from a city—a small city to the east. Her people are not many."

"A city to the east?" said Martin, frowning. "It was never found—" He caught himself, but not before Aryll had given him a sharp and puzzled glance. "What is the city called?"

"We call it Noh Ek, after the Great Star that rises over it."

"Noh Ek," repeated Martin. "The Mayan name for Venus, the morning star. And this woman's people?"

"They are named the Lords of the Morning."

Again, Martin felt a feverish wonder. He looked from the boy to Aryll, hardly able to restrain the words that rose to his lips.

"The Lords of the Morning, who wielded the powers of the gods. . . ."

Then they were not mere figures of legend, those mysterious wise ones who had come out of the east to rule? This girl was one of them!

"Of what race are you?" he asked her breathlessly. "Where did your people come from?"

Again he saw the puzzled speculation in her look. "Your interests are strange, for a greedy savage."

Chaves was shouting at him angrily. "Has the woman bewitched you, Yanez? Tell her that I'm sending an advance party to find her city, and that she goes with it, as hostage!"

Martin hesitated. Perhaps he should tell the Spaniards how he had met her before, and what she had done to him with her weapon. Perhaps he should warn them. Whoever and whatever these Lords of the Morning might be, he was sure now that they possessed an incredibly advanced technology before which the Spaniards would be helpless.

But how could he convince them of that? Science was a closed book to them. They would either ignore him as a lunatic or burn Aryll as a witch, or both—and go on to seek her city. He gave up and repeated Chaves' words to her.

Aryll answered slowly, "If I must go with you to Noh Ek, I must—but if you go there, you bring final disaster on yourselves and all your race."

V

ARYLL pointed down into the warm green bowl of a river valley. "There is the City of the Great Star."

The two score Spaniards and their Indian auxiliaries who had left Copan a week before peered from the ridge where they stood. Martin, who was interpreter now and therefore close to Aryll, felt a great surge of wonder in him. This was an unknown city. No man of his time had ever seen it, and even its name had been lost. He leaned forward, straining his eyes.

It rained. Torrents of grey and silver poured down upon the city, cloaking it in mystery and distance. Beneath the cloak its walls and towers glowed with dim strange colors, like a sunset on some far-off world. Martin caught his breath. The shaping of the walls and towers was familiar, and yet it was somehow different, too, from any he had seen before.

The rain smoked on the slope below them. The men were drenched, miserable in the humid heat, steaming like eels in a kettle. Only Aryll lifted her head to the rain gratefully. Her wet skin glistened like new gold, and her eyes were as green as the jungle.

De Guzman, *hidalgo* and veteran of Mexico, whom Chaves had put in charge of this expedition, put his horse to the steep descent. The men followed, slipping and sliding in the mud, scrambling over the yellow freshets that sprang from every old erosion. Martin's gaze was on the city.

Manrique grunted. "It looks like an abode of witches." He cast a sidelong glance at Aryll, and then at Martin.

Herrera laughed. "Remember Tenochtitlan. Remember Huitzlpotchli, and the great serpent drum that used to beat on the temple pyramid. They were not witches, but demons! And yet we broke

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their teeth. We can do it again easily."

"It's a small city," Martin said. "Very small. And old." He turned to Aryll. "How old is it?" he asked her, in the Quiche.

"Patience," she told him somberly. "You may soon know."

That was all he had been able to get out of her, since they had left Copan. He had marched constantly beside her, drawn by the mystery of her background, and drawn too—yes, he had to admit it—by herself.

"What does she say?" asked Manrique. His tone was pleasant, but his eyes were shrewd and cold.

"She says," answered Martin deliberately, "that though you like to be called a Scholar because you can read and write, you are only an ignorant child, to believe in witchcraft and demons."

Manrique's cheeks reddened above the black line of his beard. He said softly, "Indeed. And how does this wise woman explain a man's sudden knowledge of a tongue which he never spoke before?"

"I told you, Manrique. I learned it from a slave girl."

"It is strange you never told us, Pedro. You were never a silent man where your accomplishments were concerned."

"One does not need to tell everything to his friends."

"It is strange, too," said Manrique, "that you learned this tongue so well, when you could never master but a few phrases of the Aztec."

That could have been a trap, and Martin only shrugged. They stumbled on down the long steep slope, through the pounding rain.

Manrique said abruptly, "You had met the woman before. You knew her when she entered our quarters there in Copan."

"I met her, right after you went off and left me to search for loot. I tried to take her captive."

"You never told us that," put in Herrera wonderingly.

Martin shrugged again. "I didn't want to be laughed at. For she got away."

"She got away from Pedro Yanez?" cried Herrera, and roared with laughter. "Perhaps Manrique is right, and she is a witch! No human woman ever did that before!"

Manrique murmured, "I am right. This is no human woman, and she should die."

He said it so quietly, and with such conviction, that Martin went cold. He was quite sure what the rigidly superstitious Scholar would do to Aryll if he could.

And the thought of harm coming to Aryll was by now intolerable. He had thought too much about this green-eyed woman on the march, she drew him too strongly. He couldn't forget the feel of her firm, warm shoulder that time on the pyramid. He cursed himself for a fool.

The clouds rolled away to the farther hills, taking the rain with them. The tropic sun came out. And the City of the

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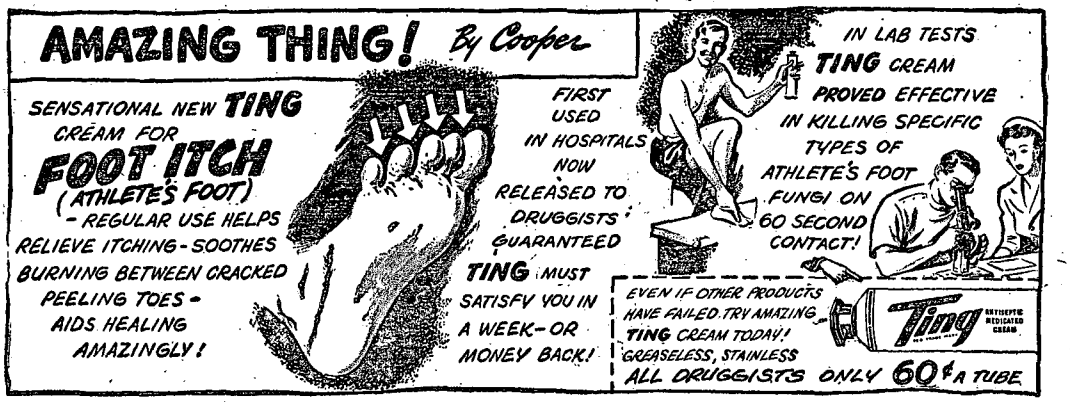
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Great Star burst into radiance, a soft magnificence of color that was like nothing Martin had ever seen. He stopped and stared at it in a kind of daze, the long low stately buildings, the truncated pyramids, the glowing shapes of amber and amethyst and pearl rising here beside a jungle river in Honduras.

IT WAS Copan and Tikal and Chichen Itza, and yet it was none of them. There were echoes in it of Babylon and Thebes, of the lost cities of Assyria and the palaces of Crete, and the old, old buried citadels of the Indus valley. And yet it was none of them. A queer trembling came over Martin, as though he stood on the threshold of some great discovery, and was afraid to cross it.

Beside him, Herrera said gloatingly, "There should be much loot!"

They had come onto the floor of the valley, where there were neat small Indian villages and farms and plantations outside the walls. There was a roadway paved with blocks of stone, and the Spaniards marched along it, the hoofs of the horses beating in a sharp quick rhythm. Men left the rich fields and women left their houses to line the road and watch, fearful of the horses and the bearded men, but making a sign of greeting to the girl.

"Slaves?" asked Martin.

Aryll looked at him with the cold contempt he had come to know so well. "We keep no slaves. They work for themselves, and we buy from them what we need." She turned to the Spaniards. "Tell them to put away their weapons. There will be no fighting."

There was none, but the pikes remained at the ready, and De Guzman's dark face did not relax.

The great gates of the city were open, and the Spaniards passed through.

"Tell her to remember," said De Guzman, "that if there is treachery, she will be the first to die."

The men clung closer together now, in a compact group bristling with the bright sharp heads of the pikes. Their boots rang on the paving stones. Their eyes were wary, probing the colored shadows, studying the columned buildings that crowned the pyramids. De Guzman set the spurs to his horse and reined him cruelly, making the beast curvet and rear, shaking foam from his bit. Martin's skin crept. There would be an attack now, surely—not with crude weapons, but with stunning rays of light.

It was a quiet city. There were men and women on the streets, not many of them, tall golden-skinned folk like Aryll, dressed in the unfamiliar tunics of bronze and green and pale metallic blue. They stopped and stared in open amazement at the Spaniards. Aryll called out to them in a language Martin did not know and could not identify.

"What is she saying?" De Guzman demanded, and Martin shook his head. The Spaniards moved closer around Aryll, hemming her in.

"Be careful!" said Martin in the Quiche. "There is a sword at your throat!"

Some of the men of the city began to run toward them, as though they meant to do something about Aryll. They were unarmed—or at least, their hands were empty. Aryll spoke to them sharply and they stopped, looking at the Spaniards with a contemptuous anger that brought fire into De Guzman's eyes. And Aryll spoke again, briefly. Martin caught the word *Copan*, and saw her hand fall in a decisive gesture.

Now, he thought. *Now they will attack!*

A cry of rage, of sorrow and astonishment went up, and the name *Copan* echoed through the streets, spoken by many voices as more and more of the golden-skinned folk gathered, crowding in around the Spaniards—who held their ground, wary but unafraid. Martin had time to wonder at the courage of these iron men of Spain, who were sweeping a whole vast continent before them, a few hundred men against a world.

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A man in a dark red tunic came forward out of the press. His face was intelligent and strong, but his eyes were gentle and his mouth was the mouth of a dreamer. Martin saw the way he looked at Aryll, heard the tone of his voice as he questioned her. And Martin was amazed to discover, all at once, that he was jealous of this stranger.

Aryll answered, with short and bitter words. The stranger in red protested, and was silenced. Far on the edges of the crowd Martin saw that men were running swiftly away, in the manner of those who carry evil news.

"Hold your ground," said De Guzman softly. "Hold your ground." He made his horse rear, striking out with nervous hoofs.

Aryll turned to Martin. "We will go on into the city. And tell your Spaniards to put away their arms! They have nothing to fear but their own stupidity."

Martin told them, and De Guzman smiled, his face twisted between greed and distrust. "There will be no violence if none is offered," he said, and looked at the jewels that burned on the throats of the golden women, and on the girdles of the men.

"Violence, eh?" Herrera whispered. "These soft creatures don't know the meaning of it—but we can soon teach them!"

Manrique muttered, "There are other weapons than the sword."

They started on into the city, and the crowd moved with them. The air was filled with mutterings, and the sound of many feet. The buildings glowed, and the sun was a radiant shimmer on the colored roofs.

Martin tried again to analyze that uncanny resemblance to all the ancient cities of Earth, but he could not. It was like trying to trace the subtle likeness between kinsmen who look alike and yet are individuals. He gave it up and studied the walls themselves. He would not have thought it possible to color stone that way. . . .

Suddenly he paused. He reached out to the wall nearest him, touched it, tapped it, and recoiled. It was not stone at all. It was of plastic.

The shock of that discovery deepened as he looked up at the buildings ahead. It was not possible!

De Guzman called back harshly, "Keep in order! No straggling! Don't let the heathen dogs get between you!"

Armor and arms of Spain glinting in the tropic sun, horse-hoofs clattering on the pavement. Dark-burned men of Spain tramping arrogantly through the glowing streets, as they had tramped into Tenochtitlan, as they would into Cuzco and Guyaquil and La Plata, into the mountains, jungles and cities of half a world, completely indifferent to the incredible strangeness of this hidden place to which they had come.

VI

THEY had come out into a wide plaza between long low buildings, with a particularly large oblong pyramid at the far end. There were three separate structures atop the pyramid, which had the highest elevation in the city, and it was his first glimpse of them that had stricken Martin with such amazement.

One of the three buildings was an observatory. And it was not of the primitive, if surprisingly accurate type with which Martin was familiar in the Mayan cities, where the astronomical equipment had consisted of an aperture in the wall and a pair of crossed sticks. This one had a telescope of advanced design, retracted now into its slot in the roof, its chrome-steel housings glittering in the sun.

Of the other two, the smaller building had on its top a complicated series of grids and antennae, reminiscent of both radio and radar—a communications center, beyond doubt, but to what and where was beyond Martin's power to imagine. The remaining structure, he thought, was either an administration building or a laboratory, or both, probably connected with lower levels in the body of

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this large oblong pyramid itself.

Down the steps of the pyramid from those enigmatic buildings, men were coming hurriedly—a small group who stared in shocked surprise at the armed invaders and then at the crowd that filled the plaza. From their bearing, and the attitude of the people toward them, there was no doubt that these were the men of authority.

It became evident that the news Aryll had brought had spread. For now a tremendous outburst of sound rose from around the plaza, a mingled cry of outrage, protest and demand. Instantly the word ran along the Spanish line, "Hold your ground!", and De Guzman rode his horse to the edge of the steps and set it rearing, so close to the men who had descended the pyramid that the foam and sweat spattered them, a gesture of defiance from an hidalgo of Spain.

The men of Noh Ek were neither frightened nor impressed. They gave De Guzman one glance of contempt for his bad manners and then ignored him. They gestured for silence, and got it, and one of them, a tall long-jawed man with a lined face and very keen eyes, who seemed to be the leader, looked down and spoke to Aryll between her guards.

She started to tell her story again in her own tongue, and Martin, in a sweat of panic, interrupted her.

"Can't you speak in the Quiche?" he demanded. "De Guzman is nervous and if he thinks you're talking treachery—I've got to be able to tell him what's going on!"

She shrugged and did as he asked. The men on the steps listened, and Martin said to De Guzman, "She is telling them how we sacked Copan."

De Guzman smiled.

The man with the long jaw heard Aryll out and turned to Martin. "I am Meherbal," he said. "At present I am in charge of the city. What does your leader want?"

Through Martin, De Guzman answered, "We bring you greetings from the King of Spain, to whom this land belongs. And we desire only peace."

"Peace," asked Meherbal, "such as you brought to Copan?"

De Guzman made an eloquent gesture. "The Copanes chose to be rebellious. They refused to acknowledge their rightful lord. And when they attacked us, we had no choice but to defend ourselves."

"The Copanes were a peaceful folk. Why did they attack you?"

"I have said, they were rebellious. It was a matter of tribute."

"Ah," said Meherbal. "Tribute."

"Robbery," said Aryll bitterly. "Rape and pillage, and the enslaving of men. Yes, the Copanes were a peaceful folk, as we had taught them to be. And when these thieves and slayers came upon them, they were helpless!" Her hands tightened and her eyes burned. "Helpless, Meherbal, and it was our doing! What place has peace on this world of barbarians? I watched the men of Copan die, and I saw their women shamed, and I tell you, Meherbal, if I had had weapons I would have killed every man of these Spanish!"

Meherbal looked at her and sighed, and his face was very sad. "This is the end, then. Five thousand years gone for nothing. These men of Mayapan were our last hope, and now there is nothing left." He turned toward De Guzman with an indescribable look of weariness and hate. "We will pay no tribute to your king. And I warn you. We are not men of violence, neither are we helpless children like the Mayas."

His face grew very stern. "You will leave the city—and you will leave in peace."

Martin translated rapidly and added urgently. "Do as he says! These people have powers. . . ."

De Guzman laughed. "So did Montezuma, but we knew how to humble his pride! We can do the same for this old man."

He swung about in the saddle and his sword came grating out of its sheath. He shouted an order, and in the same

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moment, before the words were out of his mouth, Martin had struck De Guzman's horse hard across the rump so that it leaped and threw him, and had gone forward himself against Aryll's guards.

FOR ONE SPLIT second no one, not even the Spaniards, quite realized what was happening. The guards were looking for trouble, but not from their own ranks, and Martin had just time to knock one man down with his pike-staff and send the other one reeling. He grabbed the girl and ran up the steps with her, toward Meherbal, shouting as he ran, "Look out! They're going to take you captive!"

Then De Guzman was on his feet again. The Spanish ranks shifted and reformed, and part of them swirled up the pyramid at De Guzman's heels. A terrible outcry burst against the plaza walls. The crowd was shaken as by a great wind, and suddenly a woman screamed.

Meherbal had retreated upward several steps, instinctively. His councillors were with him, and there was on them all the inertia of shock. Martin flung the girl at them. He cursed them, urging them to fight, to run, to do something. "They'll hold you hostage for the city, strip you naked, and kill you when they're through! Don't you understand? I'm giving you a chance to live!"

They did not seem to understand, and it came to Martin that Herrera had been right and that none of them, not even Aryll, who had seen Copan, really knew the meaning of violence.

He swung around then, gripping his pike in sweaty hands. De Guzman's dark face, a mask of demoniac fury, Manrique with the bright hard eyes of fanatic resolution, bearded faces half familiar, half unknown, the trampling of boots, and somebody—De Guzman—saying, "Take them alive, take me that traitor living!"

Martin laid about him with the pike and screamed at Aryll, "Where is the thing-that-spits-lightning?"

Manrique was on him, his friend, his *compadre*. "You have sold yourself to the devil," he said, quite calmly. "You have betrayed us to him, for the sake of that witch." Manrique was not going to obey De Guzman's orders, and he was old and expert in the use of arms. Martin gave back and watched the cold steel tip of the pike. There was a taste in his mouth as of bitter dust.

A flash of light flicked out and touched Manrique, and he fell. Another struck De Guzman. Small shafts of violet played upon the Spaniards like summer lightning and they dropped to the steps and were still. A low mutter ran through the ranks below in the plaza. Another charge was started up the pyramid—led by Herrera, mouthing garbled Latin and profane Spanish. The clustered lightnings swept them, and the charge was broken before it had gone three strides. The muttering rose to a wail, and then broke off.

Aryll had no shocker. Martin thought she must have left hers behind in Copan, lest it be taken from her. But the others had them, some of the councillors and a number of men who had run up the steps from the plaza. De Guzman and the others lay quiet in the hot sun, and down below the men-at-arms and the horsemen that were left stood still, as white-faced as men who have seen the Evil One himself.

Meherbal cried out, "Go! Take up your men, and leave the city."

Martin turned the order into Spanish. "These are very great wizards," he told the men below, and watched uneasily where, in the rear ranks, two or three fingered their crossbows. "They have spared your lives this time—these men only sleep and will wake again. But next time they will not. Now leave the city, while you still live!"

OVER HIS shoulder he asked Aryll, "How far is the thing-that-spits-lightning effective?"

"Not far. They are defensive only."

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"As far as those men there?"

"No."

"Don't you have *any* offensive weapons?"

"No."

"Tell your Meherbal to start up the steps—slowly. Tell the others not to move."

She spoke. Meherbal hesitated. And suddenly from below a crossbow twanged. The heavy quarrel went past Martin, past Meherbal by a hair's breadth, and took a man standing behind him squarely in the forehead. He dropped without making a sound, sliding and rolling in a leisurely quiet way down the steps, trailing his brains behind him. The Lords of the Morning watched him with a kind of horrid fascination.

"They die like men," cried a Spanish voice. "Bowmen! Arquebusiers! *Santiago!*"

MARTIN turned and ran. He gripped Aryll with one hand and Meherbal with the other and dragged them up the steps toward the nearest building, the one with the grids and antennae above its roof. Crossbow bolts began to whine and whirr, and strike. The clumsy guns went off. There were screams, and a sound of running, and the old cry of *Santiago!* rose like the howling of wolves.

They gained a doorway. Martin bolted through, thrusting the others before him. Men behind him were treading on his heels now. He heard the door slide shut with a soft clang. Meherbal broke away from him and went to a window embrasure, looking out with a sick, stricken expression on his face. There was a shocked silence in the room. Men stared at each other, and their breath came painfully. Aryll's eyes, curiously dazed, were fixed on Martin.

Martin looked out across Meherbal's shoulder. The plaza had been emptied, except where here and there someone lay quietly on the stones. The steps were swept clean. The Spaniards were in full possession of the pyramid.

"My people," whispered Meherbal. "Oh, my people!"

Martin put him gently aside. There were plastic shutters recessed beside the window. He found the catches and shut them. "Is there any way out of here?" he asked.

Aryll nodded. "At the base of the pyramid, below the storage rooms, is the entrance where supplies are brought in. But the Spaniards would see us, the moment we stepped out."

Bolt and ball spattered against the walls outside. Inside there was a faint whining and clicking from banks of tall tubes and much other apparatus beyond Martin's knowledge to recognize. A vast dark ground-glass screen covered most of one wall, surrounded by pointer-dials and computers marked with unfamiliar symbols. On the great dark screen a single dot of light showed brightly, and it seemed to Martin that it moved.

There was an abrupt cessation of sound from outside, and then a shout. "Yanez! Pedro Yanez!"

Martin yelled back, through the closed door. "What do you want?"

"Listen, traitor! We have sent for a log of wood! Tell your sorcerers that if they come out now their lives will all be spared—but if we are forced to batter down the door, only the old man will be kept alive."

"And me," asked Martin. "Do I have a choice?"

The voice outside laughed briefly. "Assuredly, traitor! Between a short dying—or a long one!"

Martin spoke to Meherbal, who glanced at him with a vague impatience and shook his head. Then he went across the room and began to talk in his own tongue to the several men who watched the dials and computers and the bright pip on the screen. Martin turned to Aryll, and she, too, shook her head. Martin smiled wryly.

"You have courage, anyway," he said. "Even if you don't know how to fight."

He shouted out to the Spaniards what they could do with their offer,

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and set about organizing a defense. Out of chairs and cabinets he constructed a makeshift barricade behind the door and set the men who had shockers behind it. "They can only come in a few at a time, and at close range," he told them. "Knock them over fast enough, and we might still do it."

Aryll watched him, thinking many thoughts. Presently she said, "Your people out there, too, have courage. We've had enemies before—wandering tribes, raiding parties from the north, even some of the men of Mayapan who grew too warlike. But none of them ever dared to attack this city, nor even one of us, after they had seen the thing-that-spits-lightning."

Martin nodded, listening to the sounds from outside where the Spaniards were making preparation. "They are not my people," he said, "except by accident. But they are brave. The devil himself couldn't turn them aside from what they want. They are—" he gave the Spanish word—"*Conquistadores*. And now I want to see that lower entrance. We don't want them coming up through the pyramid."

Aryll shook her head. "They can't. There is no stairway, and the lift is locked at this level."

"Lift," said Martin, and then laughed, rather shakily. "We're all right, then. They couldn't operate a lift no matter where it was."

"Yet," said Aryll curiously, "you seem to understand."

"I told you. They are not my people."

There was a sudden booming crash and the tough plastic slab that closed the doorway shuddered in its grooves. A pause, like a man drawing breath, as the great log swung back, reached the end of its arc, and came forward again, impelled by the sweating men on the ropes. Then the deafening crash again, the snap and clatter of the door, the room filled with jarring noises that set all the apparatus to making noises of its own. Some of the technicians looked apprehensively at the banks of vacuum tubes. Meherbal went on talking, to them and to some that had been with him when he came to meet Aryll. The bright dot crawled across the huge dark screen. Heave and crash, heave and crash, regular, rhythmic, sound and fury and white faces staring, Aryll's eyes outraged and angry.

Martin said angrily to her, "Isn't there anything at all that could be made into a real weapon?"

She shook her head. "It is against our law, our custom, and our will." She pointed to the shockers, the humane and harmless things that were only for self-protection. "Those will have to do."

Heave and crash, rhythmic, stunning. The plastic was very tough. Martin heard excitement from the corner where Meherbal stood by the screen, men talking and doing things with instruments. Somewhere something popped with a thin glassy sound. Another glassy bang and then a battery of explosions as the vacuum tubes broke from the vibrations, showering shattered particles of plastic substance as light and harmless as cellophane.

The door cracked, split, and fell apart. Shouting, cheering men flung aside the ram and leaped through, crowding in the doorway. Martin yelled, and the shockers spat their streaks of oblivion. Men fell and others climbed over them, coming fast, coming thick. There had been time for De Guzman and the others to revive, and they weren't afraid of the shockers now. They were going to smother them by sheer speed and numbers. Martin stood up and hurled whatever came to hand at the Spaniards, thinking what a wanton waste it all was, thinking of Aryll, thinking how strange it would be to die in another man's body.

And then, suddenly, out of nowhere, there came a deep and dreadful thunder from the sky.

VII

IT WAS an awesome, heart-shaking roar that increased with tremendous

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speed. It rolled over the little sounds of battle, drowned them, made them nothing. The Spanish men faltered. They stood with their weapons upraised, not using them now, but listening, beginning to be afraid. Martin felt the solid bulk of the pyramid quiver slightly beneath his feet. And he, too, was afraid.

He looked for Aryll, but she was with her own people. Remembering his own century, he tried to find some analogy for this sound that ripped and rolled across the sky as though it came to tear the world apart. He thought of jets, but the heaviest jet-plane he had ever heard in flight was not more than a whisper compared to this.

There was a shriek from outside. It was audible only because it was very close, and edged with panic. Abruptly, the Spaniards who had been so eager to get inside the room began to rush to get out of it. They had forgotten all about fighting. Martin followed them to the doorway, drawn by a terrified fascination. The man who had shrieked was still doing it, crying about the end of the world.

Martin came out onto the open terrace that formed the top of the pyramid. The sun had gone down behind high mountains to the west. Great clouds brooded in the sky, their lower edges splashed with crimson, and the still hot air shook and quivered with the mighty impact of sound. The Spaniards were scattered along the steps of the pyramid, on the terrace, and in the plaza below. They were looking up. Some of them had fallen on their knees. Others stood, but all were looking up. Martin looked up, too.

Down across that thunderous twilight came a streak of bursting flame, a thing like a falling star heading straight for Noh Ek.

For a timeless moment, no one moved. Martin, the kneeling men, the standing men, all were like figures in a tableau, caught, frozen, staring upward. Strange winds began to blow about the pyramid, and the apocalyptic fire fell and fell, from over the edge of the highest heaven, roaring as it came.

Below in the plaza the riderless horses broke suddenly and fled away. Then a man turned and ran, the way the horses had gone, and another followed him, and then more, until the Spaniards were streaming in full flight down the pyramid and into the streets that led out beyond the walls. The people of the city had begun to come out of their houses. They did not offer to touch the Spaniards, nor did they block the way. They, too, were looking up.

A blind, cold panic was on Martin. Here was a comet, a meteor, or God knew what, about to crash on the city and destroy it, and his first impulse was to run away with the others, as far and fast as he could. But some inner shame restrained him, or perhaps it was the thought of Aryll.

He looked for her, and saw her standing a little distance away, her hair whipping like a dark banner, her head uplifted, toward the fire in the sky, toward whatever was roaring at them.

Meherbal and the others were with her. Martin studied their faces. He looked down at the crowds that were gathering in the streets. Taking hard hold of his self-control, he looked again at the fearful thing that was falling on his head, and it was close now, so close that he could catch a glint of ruddy silver above the flames, and see a shape that he had not seen before, that he had never seen before.

The fear drained out of him, leaving him utterly empty. The thing that was happening was too great even for awe. He sat down on the pyramid step because his legs had no strength in them, and watched the slow, majestic landing of a ship—a long, slim, haughty ship whose element was neither air nor water.

It settled down with a final thundering of keel-jets into a wide cleared space outside the city and was still. And Martin watched it, not moving, not even thinking yet, his hands hung cold and trembling between his knees.

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LIGHTS shone out from the ports in the long hull, against the dusk of the valley. A hatchway opened, and the small distant figures of men came out of it. Still Martin did not move, except that his lips formed soundless words that had suddenly acquired meaning—*The Lords of the Morning.*

Someone stood beside him. He looked up and saw Aryll, regarding him with that half curious, half amused expression he had grown used to. He said: "You are from another world. From Venus."

"Yes."

"Of course." He looked at the golden-skinned girl with the strange eyes, and then away at the city that was not built of stone, glowing of its own soft light in the dusk. "Of course," he said again, and shivered, an uncontrollable spasm of nervous excitement that would not stop. His brain had begun to turn over again. Thoughts and questions poured out of it, incoherent, almost too incredible to be put into words, and yet the proof was there, lying beyond the walls and glimmering in the last light from the sky. . . .

He sprang up and faced Aryll, with the word *Venus* ringing in his head like a great bell.

"People from another planet, ships going back and forth—and we never knew it, we never knew! Why didn't we know? And what are you doing here, why did you come into these jungles, to these savages, when there are nations, civilized nations? You might have taught them. . ." He ran out of breath, choking on his own excitement, bewildered by the maze of paradox presented to him with such blunt abruptness.

He stared again at the ship. "Venus," he whispered. "Noh Ek, the Great Star, the morning star—that's why the Mayas knew it so well. No wonder they revered it, no wonder they learned! *You* taught them." He pointed suddenly to the ship.

[*Turn page*]

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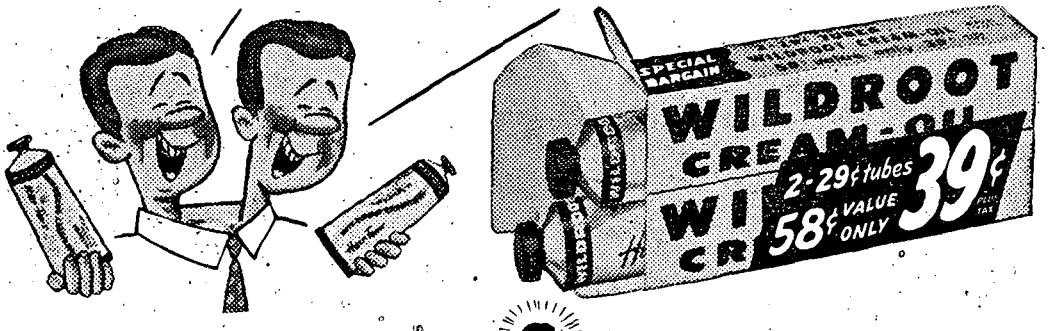

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"Did you know it was coming?"

"It's our regular supply-ship—I knew it was coming. I managed to delay a little on the march here from Copan, so that we should not arrive too much before it. I thought, since we have no weapons, that the ship might drive away the Spaniards for us." Aryll shot a smouldering glance across the pyramid. "And it did. There is not one left in the city."

"From Venus," Martin said to himself, in a queer soft voice. "Why didn't we ever know it?" He laughed a little. He had been so eager to solve the mystery of the Maya culture, and now he had a mystery so much greater that the Mayas didn't matter any more. Space flight already accomplished, people from another world living on Earth, the most tremendous and unsuspected secret of Earth's past! "How long have you been here?" he cried. "Months, years, centuries?"

Aryll was trying to say something to him, shouting impatiently across his half incomprehensible spate of words. "What will they do? Answer me, Pedro! You know them. What will they do?"

"They? Who?"

"The Spaniards!"

He had forgotten the Spaniards. Now that he was reminded of them, they seemed so remote and unimportant that he was annoyed at being forced to think about them. He could not yet drag his mind back over the wild horizons that had opened up so thunderously with the coming of the ship.

HE SHOULD have realized long before that coming that the Lords of the Morning were no part of Earth. Their tremendously advanced science alone should have told him. The records were sufficiently complete to prove that no such technology had even begun to evolve indigenously until almost his own day, and that was still in its infancy. He should have guessed, and yet how could he? If such a thing had ever happened, it would seem as though the whole world would know it, and never forget.

"The Spaniards, Pedro!" She was shaking him now. "Answer me! Will they come again, or will they go away for good?"

This time he managed to grapple with the question.

"They're afraid now," he said. "But—no, I don't think they'll go away for good."

"What *will* they do? So much depends on that, more than you know."

Martin frowned. "I think they'll send runners back to Copan, asking Chaves to come with the rest of their forces. They're brave men. They're greedy, too, and zealous. They believe in sorcery, but they also believe they can fight. They'll gather their army, and attack."

Aryll said thoughtfully, "I must tell Meherbal that. Wait here for me, Pedro."

She hurried away. Martin waited, looking down the avenues toward the distant ship. That ship that could not be, yet was. . . .

Men were coming from the ship. There was a sound in the city like the buzzing of bees disturbed in the hive, a shocked and angry sound.

These people—these people from another world!

Aryll came back to him. "We've sent some of the Maya to watch the Spaniards. And we are to have a council soon. You will have many questions to answer."

"I've a million questions to *ask!*" cried Martin. "How long ago did you people come to Earth? And why? *Why?*"

"Why? I wonder myself, sometimes," Aryll said wearily. "A crusade of idealists, an old obligation springing from our kinship—"

"Kinship? Between our worlds?"

"In the long ago—so very long ago that even to us it's only legend," she said. "Legends of an empire of worlds—an empire that slew itself by war. Your world, and mine, were of that shattered empire. On mine, the seeds of civilization survived. On Earth, they died—

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and there were only savages for a thousand years."

The conception was so vast and unfamiliar that Martin's brain was almost overwhelmed by it. Yet, here on the small round Earth, great empires had fallen and sunk without a trace—who should know that better than he, an archaeologist? Then why not an empire of worlds?

Aryll was saying somberly, "We came to Earth to relight the torch of civilization here. We have tried, for long. And this—this is the end of our trying."

VIII

ARYLL had a bitter passion in her now.

"Five thousand years," she said. "Five thousand years of patient effort, of hardship, of exile, for generation after generation of those of us who were devoted to this cause. All that toil and pain and hope, gone down the wind!"

She was talking less to him than to some blind immutable god of fate who had betrayed her and her people.

"We tried," she said. "One after another, in the warm river valleys that were most nearly like our own world, we kindled the spark of civilization. Sumer, the Indus, Egypt—each time we chose the best and wisest men, and taught them all that they were able to learn."

"Sumer . . . the Indus . . . Egypt?" Martin whispered. It seemed to him that after the years of groping in baffling darkness, a door had opened and a great light was breaking upon him. "You mean—that you of Venus were there?"

"Yes," said Aryll. "We gave them their start, struggled to foster knowledge in them. It was easy at first, for they in their ignorance revered us as gods. But later—"

Martin, listening to her, in a flash looked back and saw the history of Earth as he had never seen it. The rank savagery of it, the devoted, dedicated missionaries from the sky, the fear and superstition and legend. . . .

The Diffusionists had thought that civilization was invented in Egypt. Others had argued for Sumer. Still others, for an origin in a mythical Atlantis. All arguing from the undeniable parallels of far-separated cultures that a common source must have existed.

"But not one of them," he thought, *"ever guessed that that common source had been on another world!"*

"From the very first," Aryll was saying bitterly, "From the very first Earthmen we taught, in Egypt five thousand years ago, they betrayed our hopes. We began by teaching them writing and architecture and the working of metal. And writing and architecture they used only for superstition, and metal only for conquest of those who had no metal weapons! And we saw they were hopeless, and left them.

"And thus it was in Sumer, where the little city-states we tried to foster grew only into ferocious empires. And we left them, too. And when we tried again with the peoples of the Indus, it was the same. The snarling savages of Earth, always lusting for conquest, never wishing wisdom! Better had we abandoned the hopeless attempt to civilize them, long ago!"

To Martin, it was as though a window into Earth's lost past had opened indeed, and all the familiar history of his world seemed to whirl into pattern.

Sumer, the Indus, Egypt—and Venus was the cornerstone! The impenetrable secret of Earth's past, hinted at here and there in the legends of Osiris and Oannes and Quetzalcoatl and a dozen other teacher-gods, sought for so long and earnestly by so many devoted men—and never guessed at by any of them. A strange and magnificent secret, so simply explaining the unexplainable.

He said breathlessly, "But Persia, Greece, Rome, the nations of Europe, grew from the seeds you had planted! Why didn't you teach them your wisdom?"

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Aryll looked at him, and there was a quality almost of hatred in her gaze.

"Would you give weapons to raging wolves? Your own people out there, Pedro Yanez—what use would they make of our wisdom if we gave it?"

She shook her head. "No, there was no hope of real civilization in any of them. That is why we left them to make a fresh start here in the western world. These Mayas were our last colony, our last hope, and for generations we of Venus have come to this city we built as the last outpost of our missionary effort."

SHE looked down across the city, at the dark-skinned Mayas who moved in the streets with the fewer, golden-skinned Venusians.

"They're a peaceful folk, by nature—and we kept them so. We didn't even teach them metal-working, lest they use it for warlike conquest as the others had done. We kept them peaceful—and so now, they'll be destroyed." Her hand moved downward in a suddenly violent gesture. "There's a curse on this planet of yours! Every time a people tries to reach real civilization, the barbarian conquerors come to smash it!"

Martin thought back to his own time, and knew the dark truth of what she said.

"Yes. It's true. But when the barbarian conquerors come, you have to fight."

Aryll's head moved in sharp and utter negation. "*We* will not fight. To do so would be to betray the civilization of our own world."

The young man in the red tunic came and spoke to Aryll. She answered him, and the softness in her voice stung Martin again with that unreasonable, angry emotion.

She turned back to him. "Rawl brings word that the council is gathering."

It was a great white room within the pyramid to which they went. Two score of the golden Venusian men and women were assembled there, debating tensely. Martin, sitting not far from Meherbal in front of the council, looked across at Aryll and the man Rawl. He was suddenly conscious of how he himself must appear to these people with his unkempt beard and battered mail, dirty and stained and altogether barbaric.

The voices went back and forth, getting sharper and higher, until Meherbal made a gesture, and then turned and spoke to Martin in the Quiche.

"Now tell us of these Spaniards."

Martin told them. They asked questions, and he answered them.

"You hear," said Meherbal, into the silence that followed Martin's speaking. "The sea is no longer a barrier. The old wars and violence that we left behind in the other Earthlands have followed us here too. And we must make a choice."

He turned again to his own language, speaking sadly, sternly, but with a bitter passion. Martin sat uncomprehending, crushed by a growing fatigue, until Aryll came to him and pointed to a low doorway in the far wall.

"You can wait in there," she said. "Sleep, if you will. This will be a long debate."

There was a couch in the small room. Martin stretched out on it and was almost instantly asleep. But his sleep was a restless, shallow thing full of strange dreams and visions.

He started up, pulses hammering and body drenched with sweat, seeing again the landing of the ship, and then was aware of Aryll coming toward him. She waited until he was broad awake, and then she said:

"They have reached a decision."

She sat down beside him on the couch, more somber than he had ever seen her.

"There are some who believe that the Spaniards, like the Indians who have bothered us in the past, have been frightened so thoroughly that they'll never come back. So there has been a compromise. We'll wait and see. If the Spaniards don't come, we stay. If they attack us again, we go."

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"Go? You mean, back to—Venus?"

ARYLL nodded. "Yes. But we'll not go until we know we must. It's hard to give up everything we've worked for all these centuries. But if we must, we'll abandon Earth forever."

Martin looked at her, and already a great abyss seemed opening between them. Of a sudden, a hard, unreasonable anger possessed him.

"I see. You and Rawl will just take up and go, with the others. But what about me?"

Aryll looked at him in surprise. "We'll help you, of course, to escape the Spaniards."

He said. "So that's it? I'm just the ignorant but goodhearted savage who did you a service, and will be rewarded with a pat on the head before you leave. To hell with that! Why do you think I risked my life to save yours out there?"

Aryll, puzzled and amazed, said, "I supposed it was because you thought your comrades' intentions evil."

"I did—but that wasn't all of it," he said. And as he saw the shock of dawning understanding in her wide green eyes, he suddenly grasped her smooth wrists. "Aryll—"

She sprang to her feet, wrenching away from him in a shuddering recoiling movement. "No, don't!"

He leaped up himself, not knowing now whether it was rage or love he felt.

"So you're not to be touched by an Earthman? No wonder you Venusians have failed in your missionarying! You think of yourselves as little tin deities coming down from the sky to lay down the law to a lot of dirty barbarians!"

That lit an answering flare of anger in Aryll's lovely face. "It is not so! If we fail, it's because savages like you—"

He gave her no time to finish. The hot, angry passion that drove him surged forward, and he seized her.

"Listen," he said. "What do you think I'm made of—stone? Do you think I could be with you all these days since Copan, every minute and, not—not . . ."

She had become quite quiet in his grasp, rigid as a thing carved from wood. Something about that quietness and the way she was looking at him made the words falter in his throat, and that, too, only made him angrier. His hands tightened on her, almost cruelly.

"All right, I'm in love with you! Is there any crime in that? What are you, an angel, that you mustn't be loved? So I'm an Earthman. You said yourself that we're of one race, one blood. And if that doesn't give me any right to love you, well—I did risk my life."

He bent his head and kissed her, not caring whether she liked it or not. Her lips were stiff and cold, and then, gradually, they warmed and softened, almost parted, almost answered. . . .

She turned her head away and whispered, "Please let me go."

She was speaking to him now as a woman, and not as a being above his level. Martin let her go.

"You liked that."

"I—I don't know. Pedro . . ."

"What?"

"I am betrothed to Rawl. I have been, for a long time."

"Do you love him?"

"You have no right—Yes. Yes, I do."

He put his hands, lightly this time, on either side of her golden column of a neck, letting his fingertips slide back into the warm soft edges of her hair. "Don't the women of Venus ever change their minds?"

She shivered under his touch, and this time it was not all repulsion. Martin smiled.

"Loving isn't done like this on Venus, is it?"

HE BROUGHT his mouth to hers again, and her lips spoke under his, "No one would dream of it. We are neither savages, nor children, to tease our bodies into betraying our intelligence."

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"Oh. So you and Rawl are above this sort of thing. I wonder."

"Pedro, please . . ."

Her voice rose up shrilly. Her back arched, straining her head away from him. Martin saw that she was crying. He let her go then and stood back, all his emotions in a confused mess tempered by a certain sense of shame. Tears glistened on Aryll's lashes, but few of them fell. He could see her tremble.

"We could never understand each other, Pedro. You say you love me, but your manner of loving is not mine. It makes me afraid. And I'm sure you'd find me just as strange. I'm grateful to you for what you did, and I'll do anything I can in return, but—not this. Our minds are as far apart as our two worlds. They always will be. And—I love Rawl."

"Take him, then," said Martin. "Take him and be damned."

He stamped out of the room and into the streets, where he wandered about alone and miserable, knowing that Aryll was right and denying it in the same thought, remembering how her lips had almost answered his. If only he could have time, perhaps he could make her forget Rawl. If he had time, and the patience to be gentle, and the tact to keep from quarreling. . . .

He sought out Meherbal, a grave and anxious man beset by so many problems that he had almost forgotten there was a Pedro Yanez. Martin said, ignoring any polite preliminaries:

"If it hadn't been for me, the Spaniards would have taken you prisoner. Isn't that so?"

"Of course."

"I have something to ask in return."

"Anything in my power," Meherbal answered, courteous but beginning to doubt.

"This is well within it," Martin said. "I want you to take me with you to Venus."

Meherbal stared at him. For a long moment he stared and was silent. Then he said, "That is not possible."

"Why not? Are you afraid I'll contaminate your world? I should think my actions would have convinced you that I'm not entirely without civilized ethics."

Meherbal shook his head. "It is doubtful if you could even live on Venus."

"But you live quite comfortably here on Earth. It must work both ways."

"You don't understand," said Meherbal wearily. "We come here only for a few short years, and then go back, and others take our places. We've been doing that for generations, seeing to it that no individual stays more than the prescribed time—the safety limit. There are differences, you know. Gravitation, atmosphere and atmospheric pressure, climate, the chemical contents of foods."

"I'll take a chance on those things. They can't be too different, or you couldn't survive here at all."

"There's the mental aspect," Meherbal said. "We always knew that we were going home."

A chill crept down Martin's spine, but he said firmly, "I'll take a chance on that, too. Presumably Venus is a reasonable sort of world, with oceans and continents and cities. One could get used to it."

MEHERBAL nodded. "But it's hot, for an Earthman. And I think it would prey upon you never to see the sun or the stars. That is the chief difference between your world and mine. Your sky is clear, but ours is always blanketed with clouds. No. You're better to stay here, in your own place."

"That's fine," said Martin bitterly. "I risk my neck to save you and Aryll from the Spanish, and that's the thanks I get. Stay here. Stay here, and let the Spaniards kill me, while you and all your people go safely off into the sky. If that's the kind of justice you've been teaching us Earthlings, no wonder we're a little savage!"

Meherbal frowned. "That's an aspect of the problem I'd overlooked. Isn't there any place you could go where

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you'd be safe? We could have the Maya guard you . . ."

"The Maya can't guard themselves. And there isn't any place. You'll have to take me with you, Meherbal, unless you want to violate all your own principles and get me killed just as surely as though you'd done it yourself."

Meherbal was silent for a long while. Then he said, "Very well, Yanez. You can come."

"You don't like it, do you?" said Martin slowly. "Well, perhaps I don't either. But I think that Venus can't be any stranger to me than this world I'm in, where I have no place at all."

But when he found Aryll and told her, she uttered a little cry of dismay.

"No! You must not go back with us to our world! There will be only pain in it for us."

"Would you prefer me to remain here and be slaughtered by Chaves' men if they come?" he asked.

"No," she admitted. "But they may not come—"

"If they do," said Martin, "I go with with you. That's settled."

But, later, a pang of doubt touched him. It might be true, what Aryll had said—that their two minds were worlds apart, and could never truly understand each other.

He thrust that thought away. They were man and woman, and love was bigger than habit or custom—sometimes even bigger than truth, finding ways to overcome it. He could do it. He could make her feel about him the way he felt about her.

The city waited, then. Waited for the fateful tidings that meant life or death. The terraced pyramids glowed with as soft a splendor as before, the people walked their streets, but there was a difference. Even the air seemed heavy, robbed of life and purpose.

Then, on a dark morning just before dawn, a Maya runner slipped in through the city gates and gasped out his news stutteringly.

Chaves was marching from Copan.

IX

NIGHT. The last night on Earth for Edward Martin, and the men of the Morning Star.

From where he stood, on the height of the tall pyramid, Martin could see over most of the city and the plain beyond the wall where the great ship lay in a glare of light. They were still working out there, loading the last of the needed supplies, and the embarkation had begun. Even at this distance he could see the confusion around the open hatches, and some echo of the clamor reached him. It would be his turn very soon now. He would walk out across the plain and take his place in the crowded holds of the ship, with these people who were not his own, and the Earth would be lost to him forever.

He was one of the group that would be the last to leave the city—chiefly because Rawl, with several young men, had stayed to help Meherbal with the final steps of the evacuation, and because Aryll had stayed with Rawl. Martin was worried. There had been no runner since yesterday, with news of the Spaniards' advance.

There were only three of them now on the pyramid—himself, and Aryll and Meherbal. Rawl and his young men had gone away somewhere, their faces set and stony with the look of men who go to do some hateful task that cannot be avoided. The streets of the city were already deserted of Venusians, except where, by the gateway that led outward to the ship, the Lords of the Morning were taking their last walk in the dust of this planet they had broken their hearts for, and lost. But there was a new thing now among them, a new complication, a danger, and a well-nigh unbearable pain.

The Maya had come.

All day they had been coming, the chiefs and the wrinkled headmen of the outlying villages, the hunters from the forest, the women from the fields and the grinding-stones. They thronged the

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great plaza below the pyramid and flowed back into the streets around it. Looking down, in the gentle brilliance of the lights that would shine no more after tonight, Martin saw them as a vast tapestry of underlying bronze, picked out with the bright colors of plumes and feather mantles, streaked with the whiteness of linen garments. They were silent, except that now and again a moaning swept them, and now and again a single voice cried out, desolate, hopeless, lost.

Martin looked at them. He looked at the city, the beautiful unearthly shapes of it. He thought of all it meant, and all that it might have meant to the race of men on Earth. And the knowledge that all this had to perish because of Chaves and his men filled him with a rage and sorrow.

He glanced at Meherbal, and then away again. At this moment, even a glance was an intrusion. He wanted to say something but there were no words, nothing. He could only stand silent and watch.

An old chief stepped forward from the edge of the crowd below, and mounted the first of the pyramid steps.

"Lord," he cried out. "Lord of the Morning Star!"

Meherbal groaned, but he did not move.

"Speak to them," Aryll whispered, and her own voice was choked with tears.

"I have," Meherbal answered. "Over and over I have, but they won't listen, they won't leave."

"Speak to them," she said again, and urged him forward. "Look there, Rawl is coming back. There isn't any time now, and they must go, they must! Away from here, and far away, before the Spaniards come."

FOR a moment Meherbal hesitated. Then he forced himself to move, out into the full light and down the broad steps, a little way, so that all could see him.

A wailing cry went up from the crowded plaza, and the packed mass swayed and rippled as though a wind had crossed it. The old chief raised his arms and cried:

"Lord, we are your children! What can children do without a father? How shall we live, if you are gone?"

"Return to your own ways," Meherbal answered, speaking to them all, in a voice that sounded from the plaza walls with all the sadness of a passing bell. "Remember what you can of our teachings, follow them as well as you can. And may the gods have you in their keeping."

"But, Lord!" A young man sprang up onto the steps, holding in his hand a wooden sword edged with obsidian. "You have taught us not to fight, and we have not fought except as we fought at Copan, to protect our wives and children. Now let us fight! Let us gather our young men, let us make weapons, let us drive back these bearded ones!"

"As you drove them back at Copan?" Meherbal shook his head. "No. Their steel and powder are too strong for you. Your only safety lies in flight. Go north! Take your wives and your families and your old ones and go north, into the mountains." His voice rose, urging them, commanding them. "You must go now! The bearded ones will be here with sunrise, bringing death or slavery for you all."

"No," they said from the plaza. "No, we will stay with you. You cannot go away and leave us!"

Rawl had mounted the western face of the pyramid. Now he spoke quietly to Meherbal from the terrace.

"The fuses are all in place, and the men are waiting. Those are the last of our people—" he pointed to the dwindling group around the gate "—and the city is cleared, except for the Maya."

A pang almost of physical sickness struck Martin. Destroy the city. He had known they were going to do that. He had understood why they had to.

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The ship had room for little more than the passengers. So much must be left—the instruments and equipment and scientific apparatus, the power plants, the countless things that go with a technologically advanced civilization. Wisdom far too potent to fall into the hands of barbarians who might, just possibly, learn to fashion new weapons from the things of peace. And yet, now that the time had come, Martin found that he still could not accept the fact of that destruction.

These pyramids, these columned buildings and wide courts, the grace and light and color—all vanished, wiped out and gone? It did not seem that such a thing could be. Within a year or two the jungle would have covered the empty spaces, and the jaguar would hunt there, and there would not even be a memory of this place and all it stood for.

Meherbal spoke again to the Mayas. "It is time for us to leave now. We shall fire the city, so that nothing of ours shall fall into the hands of the bearded ones, to be used against you. You must—"

The rest of his words were lost. For one moment, when he told them of the planned destruction, there was absolute silence, and then such a cry went up that the ears were deafened by it.

"No, no—not the city!"

Martin realized that to the Mayas this must be a sacred place, the dwelling of the Lords they revered almost as gods, the shrine of all wisdom and what was to them great magic.

The roar of the crowd rose up and up, and then the forward ranks began to waver and break outward and surge in hesitant but growing waves up the steps of the pyramid.

"Stay with us! We will hold you, we will keep you: Your magic will destroy the bearded ones—stay with us, your children!"

"It's no use," Meherbal said, and mounted to the terrace. "Rawl, give the signal to fire the north-east quarter. They will go when they see the blaze, and their way is clear."

"All right," said Rawl. "But come inside before they take you. We'll leave by the lower way."

Meherbal suffered himself to be thrust inside the communications room—the same room where they had withstood the siege when the Spanish had wanted Meherbal. And Martin thought how different these two times had been, and the motives of the two peoples.

RAWL paused at an instrument panel and depressed a switch. What system of signals had been arranged Martin did not know. But Rawl rejoined them and said:

"The charges will go off now at intervals, beginning in the north-east section and working this way. The Mayas will have all the time they need to get clear." He made his voice very matter-of-fact, as though it were a thing of no importance that the city was about to burn, but his face gave him away. Martin quite forgot that he hated Rawl, and was deeply sorry for him, even when he put a comforting arm around Aryll's shoulders.

Drawn by a curious compulsion, they went to the window from which they had watched the Spanish attack in the plaza. The Mayas were moving up the pyramid, uncertain, driven by longing and yet afraid, awed by the house of magic into which Meherbal had gone. The city lay quiet in the bend of the jungle river, very peaceful, glowing with many colors in the night.

There came a sound, not very loud, and after it an interval that seemed to Martin to go on forever. Then, in the far north-east section of the city a little glow sprang up, and brightened, and grew into a pillar of greenish flame—chemical fire that ate into the plastic substance of the city and crumbled it and swept it away. Aryll gave one tight, harsh sob, and turned her back.

"Let's go," she said. "Why don't we go?"

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Rawl started with her toward the lift. Outside, the Mayas, had stopped their slow ascent of the steps. There, and in the plaza, every head was bent toward the new light that had come into the city, limning the unearthly skyline in a quivering aurora. The close-packed thousands stirred and swayed, and then there came one terrible howl of grief. . . .

Meherbal left the window, moving as though he carried a great weight on his shoulders that pressed him down and made his steps the steps of an old man. Martin followed him into the lift. The door closed and the cubicle sank whirring down through the body of the pyramid. Aryll was standing by herself, trying fiercely not to weep. And no one spoke.

They went out through a passage on the lowest level, through wide doors into an avenue that led straight toward the gateway of the ship. Nothing stirred along its way. The houses on each side were silent, empty, waiting patiently for death. Only behind them, beyond the bulk of the tall pyramid that stood like a wall against the sky, was there any sound, where the Mayas wailed the passing of the city and its lords.

They reached the gateway, and passed through it, joining the last of a thin line of men and women moving out across the plain. Rawl spoke softly to Aryll, saying, "Don't look back. It will be easier that way." She bowed her head and stumbled along over the dusty ground. The others in the sad procession went that way, too. But a strange quality came into the light that was over the plain between the city and the ship, tinging the clear white glare with green and sickly yellow and bands of umber, and the little wind that blew was tainted with an ugly acrid stench. And one by one the people stopped and turned, not wanting to, gripped by a dreadful fascination.

The city was in full flame. The fire wrapped it around, and underneath that deadly cloak the shapes of the buildings wavered and flowed and shifted, like the shapes of clouds that melt between the sun and wind. Already that north-eastern corner where the blaze had started was collapsing into dark and ashes.

From far off, out of sight beyond the city wall, there came a mournful sound of drums and chanting, where the Mayas made their way into the jungles toward the north.

SO IT was over. It was done. The end of an epic hope.

Martin went on with the others, keeping close to Aryll. Out across the plain the great silver hulk gleamed, its hatches open wide. Once inside of them. . . .

A coldness and a fear came over him. He looked up at the clear sky and the stars that he was not going to see again, and he wished with a terrible longing that he might have one more glimpse of the sun coming over the eastern ranges, before the eternal clouds of Venus enveloped him. And while he was looking and longing and feeling more and more lost and afraid, there came a sudden piercing cry of *"Santiago!"* from the edge of the jungle on his left, and a thundering of hoofs across the open land.

Martin knew, with a sudden freezing knowledge, that his foreboding had been true—and that one of their famous forced marches had brought Chaves' wolves up in time.

The people of the city paused like startled deer, staring at the shapes of the horsemen coming, and the shadowy ranks of the soldiers behind them. Then they began to run, toward the safety of the ship that was close to them, but not quite close enough.

"Spread out!" Martin shouted. "Scatter!" He reached out for Aryll, and then the charging horsemen were into them, through them, and over, and the air was full of neighing and the clash of mail.

The horses wheeled in a wide circle toward the ship, and Martin thought

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incredulously, "They're going to charge it as though it were a castle to be taken from the Moors!" Rawl had been swept away by that first charge. Martin saw him in the distance, trying to make his way back toward Aryll. The girl had screamed once. Martin held her with a desperate grip, trying to shield her body with his own. He began to run with her, and then the footmen came, coursing like lean hounds, and the bolts from the crossbows buzzed.

Chaves and De Guzman. Spanish mail and Spanish horses, Spanish greed and the magnificent, terrible courage of Spain. *Conquistadores,* going up against the shining citadel of that alien ship, not knowing what it was, not caring, except that it was the work of Satan, to be taken and looted and trampled underfoot. And they were so sure they could do it.

There was screaming now, and a broken confusion of people running, falling, shouting, swinging murderous swords and pikes, plying the little shockers with the bright rays. The powerful lights around the ship showed up every detail with ghastly clarity—the red nostrils and wild eyes of a horse going by without a rider, the color of blood on a pale blue tunic, the face of a Spanish archer as he tore the collar of jewels from a woman's neck. The ship was so close, so bitterly close, but there were Spaniards by it, fighting around the open hatchways. Martin kept going. He heard the name of Pedro Yanez shouted. A pike struck hard against his mailed back, slid off and gashed his shoulder, but he kept going, trying to lose himself in the confusion, taking Aryll with him.

Suddenly, like the anger of Jove, the stern tubes of the ship let go with flame and thunder.

The awful roar and concussion of that explosion of force stunned Martin, crushed him to his knees. Almost at once the lights around the ship went off, leaving a blind obscurity through which the terrible plume of flame flared and flickered like the open throat of hell. By that weird glaring Martin saw the Spaniards fleeing, deafened, reeling, the mailed riders trampled by their insane horses. He understood then that the people inside the ship had done this, hoping to drive their attackers off long enough to save those who were left outside. Still clutching Aryll, he struggled up against the hammering waves of sound that shook the very plain beneath his feet and started on again toward the open hatch. There were others doing the same thing, disjointed knots and pairs of people running, scrambling, dragging with them their dead and wounded. A vast relief swept over him. They could make it now, and Aryll was still alive, and safe.

ACROSS the quivering earth, away from the ship and toward him and the girl, there came a man.

Manrique.

Aryll cried out something, but her voice was swallowed up in the thunder of the jets. Manrique's sword was red and shining in the glare. His face was shadowed by the battered morion so that he seemed eyeless, faceless, an impersonal instrument of vengeance, stalking in ragged boots. And there was no way past him, no way to reach the ship.

Martin flung Aryll from him. She would not go, and he pushed her, struck at her, screamed at her to run, to circle Manrique. But she would not. The Spaniard came on. He alone had stayed. He alone had withstood the thunderings of hell to see his comrade Yanez. Martin saw now that his beard moved, as though he spoke.

The jets shut off. Darkness, leavened by the dying ashes of the city. Silence. And in the silence, Manrique's voice saying quietly, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." More words, the sonorous Latin words he was so proud of knowing. The sulphurous gleaming picked out his morion and the dull glitter of his sword.

There were men, two of them, Meher-

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bal and Rawl, coming out from the group around the hatchway, coming for Aryll. But there would not be time, and the shockers did not carry far enough. Martin took Aryll's fingers and tore them from his arm. He struck her, hard enough to daze her for an instant, and then he turned and ran, fast, before she could recover and follow him. Only three or four steps he ran, and then he and Manrique came together. Martin twisted to avoid the blade and got his hand around Manrique's throat, bore him down and held him. And the dagger that he had not seen, carried in Manrique's left hand, found his side, where there was no steel to cover it. He did not let go of Manrique's throat.

A remoteness, and a dream. A dream of Aryll's face above him, and a man's voice speaking far away—"No use, he is dying." A feeling as of a soft hand on his forehead, and perhaps a teardrop on his cheek. Then dark waves rolled over him, very peaceful, very quiet. He lay still on the plain beside Manrique, and the darkness thickened, and suddenly he did not like it because it hid the dream.

He fought the darkness. There was a roaring in it now, a thunder and a flame, and he knew what it was, he remembered. Aryll. Aryll was leaving him, leaving Earth forever. He struggled up, and through a strange obscuring haze he saw the great ship lift up slowly on its jets of fire, shaking itself free of Earth, bound outward into the clear gulfs beyond the sky.

Martin cried out one longing name, and then the darkness swept over him again, not gentle this time, but full of howlings and strange winds, driving him he knew not where. He knew then that he was dying, in this body that was not his, and he was very much afraid.

X

WORDS, then darkness, and words again.

"*. . . . more lives than one . . .*"

What was the vague thought, the words, that kept tormenting him in the howling blackness that enwrapped him? The words that kept coming back to his fading consciousness as he plummeted and plunged through abysmal gulfs?

"*. . . . more lives than one . . .*"

Martin heard a voice. A strange yet familiar voice, speaking a strange yet familiar language.

"Ed! Ed Martin!"

He choked, struggled, tried to open his eyes and couldn't. He smelled wood smoke, felt someone supporting him. Then a pungent, acrid chemical vapor stung his nostrils.

His eyelids wrenched open. He looked up into a homely, worried face—a face that he had known eternities ago.

Farris' face.

"Thank God you finally came out of it," Farris babbled. "All these days—absolute coma—"

Farris. The tent. The neat little archaeological camp. He'd come back from the darkness, then. But of course he had come back! When Pedro Yanez had died, the mind of Edward Martin, trapped until then in Yanez' brain-cells, had broken free and fallen back along the world-lines to its own proper matrix. . . .

And, of a sudden, Martin knew those words that had haunted him in the blackness. They'd been in his mind as he—as Yanez—died.

"*. . . he who lives more lives than one,*
More deaths than one must die."

The memory of Aryll took him like a sharp pain, and he felt a bitter sorrow that he had come back. He had lost more than a life in that other existence. It would have been better to sleep, there on the plain beside Manrique, than to wake and remember.

Farris was half-hysterical in his relief. "Nearly went crazy, with you lying there like that and no doctor in hundreds of miles!"

"It's all right," Martin said dully. "I'm all right now."

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Farris stared at him, hesitated, and then asked, "Ed, was it that thing you were talking about, that did it? Your mind . . ."

"Maybe it was," Martin said slowly. "Or maybe just fever coma and dreams. How can you tell?"

He knew differently. But what was the use of going through it all? He didn't want to talk about it, now. He didn't think he would ever want to talk much about it.

"Well, sure, that's probably what it was," said Farris nervously, seizing upon the comforting everyday explanation. "Sure—fever. You lie quiet now, Ed."

He lay quiet. He lay and looked through the open tent door, at the dark, star-shot sky. He felt vaguely that he might yet catch one last glimpse of a great ship homeward bound, trailing fire against the stars.

Crazy. Of course it was. That had been long ago, that the ship had left, that the men of Venus had abandoned hope for Earth. Over four hundred years of pain and struggle for Earth, since then.

He thought of Aryll's somber prophecy, "You of Earth will destroy yourselves, in the end."

"Perhaps," Martin thought. "But we haven't, yet. And if we can win through—"

He astonished Farris the next morning by telling him, "I'm through with archaeology. For good."

Farris started to protest such a decision, but then fell silent. After a moment he said, "Perhaps you should, at that. I mean, that queer obsession of yours—"

He didn't finish that, but he didn't have to.

A little later he asked, "What do you think you'll do?"

Martin answered slowly. "Rocket engineering, I think."

Farris' mouth fell open at that. "Rockets? But Ed, that's clear out of your line. I mean, it would take years of new study—"

"I've got the years."

"I know—but why rockets?"

"I just have an idea," Martin said, "that I might be able to help a little in the project of building a ship to reach other worlds."

He was still young. It was not beyond the realm of possibility that he might be among the first of the sons of Earth to reach Venus. Not until then would anyone believe the story of the Lords of the Morning who millenniums ago had come to Earth! Not until then could Earthmen learn the secret of their own past, of the Venusians' age-long, epic effort and its final failure.

Failure! Martin thought of the city that had lain not so very far from here, beside the jungle river. He thought of its destruction, of that tragic last departure from it. But failure? Had it really been that?

Aryll had bitterly said that the seeds they had sown had never taken root. But they had—had become part of the heritage of Earth. If ever they could flower fully, ships from Earth would cross the gulf to Venus, and bring proof that it was so.

He spoke, to a woman lost forever in the dark backward of the years.

"I think, Aryll—I hope—that perhaps you did not entirely fail."

Next Issue—A Brilliant New Manning Draco Novelet

THE POLLUXIAN PRETENDER

By KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

AND MANY OTHER STORIES

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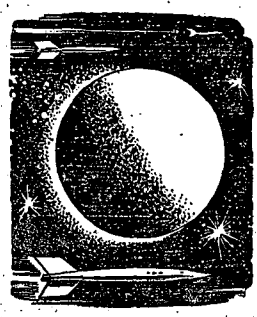
OUR INHABITED UNIVERSE



PART VIII—Pluto and Beyond

By JAMES BLISH

FAR OUT from the Earth, in the immense darkness on the rim of the solar system, swings a strange little planet which is a mystery to us in almost every way. This is the planet Pluto, ninth in order of distance from the sun, and the most recently discovered.

Pluto's mean distance from the sun is 3,675,000,000 miles, or about 39.5 times the distance of the Earth from the sun. The orbit which Pluto follows is so eccentric, however, that at its closest approach to the sun it is actually a little inside the orbit of Neptune; and at the other end of its orbit, it is far outside the mean distance given. At that point in Pluto's year (which is 248.43 of our years), the sun as seen from Pluto is just another star, brighter than any other star in Pluto's sky, but nevertheless just a point of light, showing no disc at all. The star Alpha Canis Majoris would offer it serious competition as the brightest object visible from Pluto.

Pluto is in all respects a strange, incorrigible planet, resisting stubbornly our best attempts to observe and understand it. In tables of planetary data it is represented mostly by question-marks, and the few figures which we have cautiously filled in keep turning out to be wrong. Partly, of course, this is because Pluto is our most recent acquaintance among the planets; and partly it is because Pluto is so far away from us that it is difficult to observe. But basically our trouble with Pluto is that there really shouldn't be any such planet.

The Miraculous Discovery

Pluto was discovered in 1930 by Clyde Tombaugh of Lowell Observatory, Flagstaff, Arizona. Lowell himself, however, had predicted the planet's existence and probable orbit prior to his death in 1916. His predictions did not turn out to be very accurate; certainly they were nowhere near as accurate as astronomers' predictions popularly are supposed to be; but they were good enough to tell Tombaugh where in the sky he ought to look. Why, then, did it take Tombaugh

The Little Planet Which Shouldn't Be There!

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and his staff more than 14 whole years to find the planet? Galle found Neptune the evening of Sept. 23, 1846; he had gotten the letter from Leverrier telling him where to look *on the morning of the same day!* The search for Pluto (or "Trans-Neptune," as it was called until its discovery), on the other hand, began in 1906, so actually it took *twenty-four years* to find Pluto!*

This enormous discrepancy does not reflect in any way upon Tombaugh or upon Lowell. It simply emphasizes the thoroughness of their search. It was a miracle that Pluto got found at all, for it is *not* the "Trans-Neptune" Tombaugh and Lowell were looking for.

Remember that all of the planets outside the asteroid belt which we have discussed so far—which means all of them but Pluto—are gas giants: enormous bodies, attended by many satellites, bodies of low density whirling with phenomenal rapidity upon their axes. None of them is comparable in any way to the "Earth-like" planets inside the asteroid belt.

The search for "Trans-Neptune" was carried on under the natural assumption that it would turn out to be a gas giant too. Indeed, the search would not have been undertaken at all had it not been for gradually developing errors in the predicted orbits of Uranus and Neptune, errors which seemed to suggest that there must be still another huge, massive body beyond Neptune which was exercising a pronounced gravitational effect upon its two nearest neighbors.

Lowell's figures called for a gas giant at a considerable distance out from Neptune. "Trans-Neptune" should have turned out to be as big in size and density as Neptune itself, and its distance from the sun should have been more than twice the entire distance of the planet Uranus from the sun.

Pluto fulfills not a single one of these conditions. It is not a gas giant. It is by no means as big as Neptune; it is scarcely a tenth of Neptune's diameter, which makes it smaller than any of the inner planets except Mercury. It is not twice as far away from the sun as Uranus; indeed, as we've noted above, it comes closer to the sun than Neptune does at one point in its orbit. And its density is high—as high as that of the Earth at the very least.

Pluto, in short, is physically an Earth-like planet. Astronomically, in terms of the path that it follows around the sun, it doesn't act like a planet at all, but like one of the odder satellites of Jupiter; its orbit is not only highly eccentric, but also heavily tilted against the plane of the orbits followed by all the other planets of our system.

Is Pluto not a member of our solar family at all, but instead a wanderer which was captured by our sun only very recently? This "capture" hypothesis was once very popular among astronomers; it is subject to a good many objections, but no other explanation which has been offered so far holds up any better, or any worse. We simply do not yet understand why Pluto should have turned out to be so small, so "close," and so erratic.

Snowball Planet

The closer one looks at Pluto, the knottier the problem becomes. Measurements made at Mt. Palomar in 1950, by Kuiper and Hunason, indicate that the diameter of Pluto is about 3,550 miles (which is the diameter of Saturn's satellite Titan.) This discovery makes Pluto harder to understand than ever. During the days when less accurate measurements were still in force, when Pluto was thought to be about as big as the Earth, Pluto's albedo or light-reflecting power worked out to about 15%—the same as the albedo of Mars, twice the albedo of Mercury. This led us to as-

*Actually this is not quite fair. The initial search covered not one, but two predicted positions, and stopped at Lowell's death; it did not begin again until 1929, when the Lawrence Lowell telescope went into operation at Flagstaff. This makes the real elapsed search-time for Pluto slightly over eleven years. Even this figure, however, doesn't stack up very well against the Galle-Leverrier record of less than a single day for the spotting of Neptune.

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sume that Pluto had at one time had an atmosphere, but that that atmosphere had been frozen out, and must now lie on the rocks in "snowdrifts" of unimaginable coldness.

But if Pluto is only half as big as we then thought it was, its albedo must be much higher than 15%. How could a planet less than half the size of the Earth, a planet which cannot have a gaseous atmosphere, be so brilliant at a distance of more than three and a half billion miles from the sun?

Thus far, nobody has come up with a good guess, let alone an adequate theory.

This new measurement of Pluto's diameter also casts serious doubts upon its massiveness, which we had previously been figuring from the observed perturbations of Uranus and Neptune. In order for Pluto to have been responsible for those effects, it would have to have a mass equivalent to that of a sphere of solid iron 6,500 miles in diameter.

But it now appears that Pluto itself is 3,000 miles *smaller* in diameter than that hypothetical ball of iron. Consequently, if Pluto nevertheless is responsible, all by itself, for the disturbances in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune, it must be enormously denser than solid iron, or fifty times as dense as water—ten times the density of the Earth.

This doesn't seem very likely. To be as dense as all that, Pluto would have to be made mostly of lead—not an out-and-out impossibility, but highly improbable, especially in view of its brightness.

In view of the many contradictions in Pluto's observed characteristics as against those which were expected of it, it is not surprising that astronomers are coming around more and more to the view that Pluto is not, after all, the "Trans-Neptune" they were looking for. That hypothetical gas giant may still whirl undiscovered in the darkness beyond Pluto.

Making this assumption does away with some of the problems connected with Pluto, particularly those of Pluto's apparently high mass and density. If Pluto is not the planet responsible for most of the perturbations of Uranus and Neptune, then we need not assume that Pluto's mass is nearly as high as we would otherwise be forced to accept. We can instead assume that the mass of Pluto is consistent with its diameter and its brightness, which would make Pluto essentially an Earth-like (or Mars-like) planet, with an extremely regular surface covered with frozen gasses.

The as yet undiscovered tenth planet, even under these assumptions, would prove extremely difficult to spot—even more difficult than Pluto was. No matter how dim a view we take of Pluto's chances of being the densest planet in the solar system, we will still have to agree that its mass is planetary, and hence capable of exerting *some* effect on Uranus and Neptune. We will have to sort out these effects from that exerted by "Trans-Pluto," and the difficulties of that job are great enough to make any astronomer's head swim. Furthermore, the presence of Pluto makes it likely that "Trans-Pluto," though probably a gas giant, is not a very big gas giant; otherwise the effect upon Uranus and Neptune would be greater and easier to spot.

Portrait of "Trans-Pluto"

"Trans-Pluto," if it exists—and the chances are fairly good that it does—is a body about 25,000 miles in diameter, hence the smallest of all the gas giants. Its mass is about 12.8 (Earth=1), and its surface temperature is so close to the absolute zero (-460°F.) that very little of its atmosphere can be in the gaseous state. Possibly it is mantled mostly in hydrogen; it may also have one or several "seas" of boiling liquid helium. Its mean distance from the sun is slightly over 4,000,000,000 miles.

If it is a typical gas giant, it will have several satellites, and at least one of these will be as large as 1,000 miles in diameter—but we will never see any of

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these from the Earth, for the amount of sunlight they will be able to reflect back to us, even if their albedos are high, could never be great enough to fight its way through our atmosphere. We will be lucky if we are able to get even a ghostly photographic image of the primary body, "Trans-Pluto," itself, at least until we are able to set up an astronomical observatory on our Moon and get our first unobstructed look at space.

Neither Pluto, "Trans-Pluto," nor any satellite of either could support life of any imaginable sort. I doubt that human beings will ever visit any of these bodies; there would be no reason, not even a research reason, to do so. Out here on the marches of the solar system there is nothing but blackness, ultimate cold, and eternal desolation, presided over by the remote points of other suns than ours.

Many of these other suns, we now believe, have planets of their own. Many of these planets must be warmer and friendlier to life than Pluto or "Trans-Pluto," as we'll see in our next article. And there is a small, a very small chance that Pluto once belonged to one of these remote, other suns.

Pluto certainly does not seem to belong where it is. It is an Earth-like planet, and there is no theoretical place for an Earth-like planet among the gas giants.

If Pluto is ever visited, it will be visited because we have found that the dense, frigid little world was riven from another star, and was not originally our sun's property at all. We will visit Pluto in search of traces of the life it may once have supported while it was a warm planet, a planet like Mars—

And in search of traces of the catastrophe which flung it away from its own sun into the interstellar wastes, and made of it a true wanderer—the meaning of the Greek word "planet"—in search of a new sun to warm it. Probably, however, we will find no such traces; for a disaster great enough to throw a planet away from its sun would also be great enough to wipe out all the surface features of that planet, right down to the core. There would be nothing left but that core: a dense, smooth, uneventful ball, its face bland and expressionless, reflecting back light which can do nothing for it any more.

Nothing left, in short, but a planet like Pluto.

Do other suns have Earthlike Planets . . . with Earthlike beings?

Read Part IX of "Our Inhabited Universe"—

EARTHS OF OTHER SUNS

By JAMES BLISH

NEXT ISSUE!

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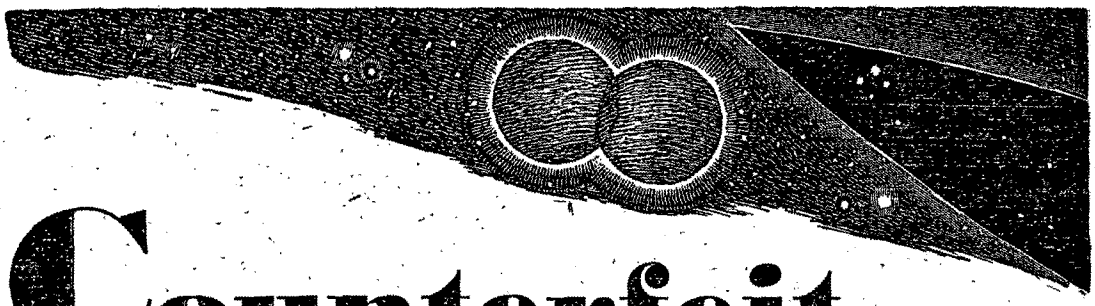

Counterfeit

a novelet by ALAN E. NOURSE

THE GREAT SPACESHIP plunged through the black starways toward the orbit of the third planet. Its trip had been long. It was homeward bound.

Donald Shaver sat staring at the navigation board, his face grey. He gazed blankly at the space-charts, and a tremor shook his narrow shoulders. He took a quavering breath, shivering again.

A tall, blond giant swung open the hatch and sauntered into the navigation shack, his red face beaming. "Ho, Donnie!" he bellowed. "We're off that blasted sink-hole at last, eh? What do you think of that?" He glanced by habit at the bright red dot on the navigation board, then turned and peered happily out the observation port, rubbing his hands in anticipation.

"I wish I were home," said Shaver, dully.

The blond man laughed, slapping his thigh in high glee. "You and eighty others! Don't worry, laddie, we're on the way. Just another week now, and—"

The boy's voice cut in with deadly urgency. "I wish I were home *now*." He took another breath, an unmistakable shudder shook his body. The blond man turned, his eyes widening in alarm.

"Donnie!" he said softly. "What's wrong, laddie?"

The boy's face was pasty grey, and his knuckles whitened as he gripped the table. "I'm sick, Scotty!" he whispered. "Oh, Scotty, please, get the Doc—I'm awful sick!" He shook in another uncontrolable tremor, losing his grip on the table and toppling forward—

The tall Scot caught him as he fell, easing him down to the warm steel deck. "Hold on, Donnie," he whispered. "I'll take care o' you." The boy doubled up suddenly in a paroxysm of coughing, choking, his face blue. His back arched and twisted in convulsion; then, abruptly, he relaxed.

Like a cat, Scotty crossed the room, snatched up a phone from the table, rang it frantically. "Navigation to Central," he snapped. "Get the Doc up here in a hurry. I think—" He glanced, wide-eyed, at the still form on the deck. "I think a man just died!"

Only the doctor guessed who the alien

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I

DOCTOR JOHN CRAWFORD leaned back in the relaxer, spreading his long thin legs out in front of him, and stared glumly out his observation port. He had been sitting there for over an hour, hardly moving, his slender fingers toying with the greyish cards in his hands, staring, and smoking, and scowling. For the first time in the long voyage he felt tired, and alone, and terribly afraid—

The doctor might have been handsome, had he straightened up, and shaved, and changed into a fresh Exploratory Command uniform. He was a long, lanky man, his thin, gaunt face hardened by the dark stubble of two days' beard, and a shock of jet black hair, slightly uncombed, contributed to the air of careful, preoccupied concern that hung about him like a shroud. "Doctor Ponderous," one of the men had

invader might be—but it was too late!

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called him, in an unguarded moment, and he had smiled a slow, wide smile, and chuckled to himself as he walked away.

That was probably the picture the men on the ship had of him—slow of speech, possibly a little dull, a reasonably pleasant and harmless fellow who seemed to be just too big and gawky to be walking around the corridors of a space ship. Doctor Crawford knew it wasn't true, of course—he knew he was neither slow nor ponderous, and certainly he was not dull. He was just careful. A ship's doctor on an exploratory mission had to be careful, in every thought and action. There were too many possible disasters, too many horrible deaths, too many things for a doctor to watch for in space, to consider from every angle, too many things to permit anything but careful, thoughtful consideration of every aspect of the voyage. The great, disease-gutted hulks of a dozen earlier exploratory ships had proved that, so very conclusively. . . .

Dr. Crawford stared from the port, watching the unblinking white pinpoints of starlight on the black-velvet background, his frown deepening, and the chill of fear went through him again. He had been in on this voyage from the very beginning, helping with the meticulous preparation, testing and examining the eighty crew members who had reported aboard in Los Alamos Spaceport, watching, thinking, guarding against any possible slip-up, any sign of danger, and he had watched in vain. To have called the trip unsuccessful, from any viewpoint, would have been mild. After all the anticipation, all the excitement, it had been a dud. A complete, miserable, hopeless dud, from beginning to end. Somehow, in the back of his mind he had expected adventure, a thrilling challenge to him as a doctor, something to tax his mind to its limit, bringing him face to face with wonders and problems of which he had never dreamed—and he had started back with the ship, the tired, bored doctor of eighty tired, bored spacemen. No glory. No discovery. Nothing.

Until an hour ago. . . .

HE STARED at the cards in his hands, feeling the chill run up his spine again. It had taken just an hour to change the picture, to alter it completely, and fearfully. Just an hour ago Jensen, the Chief Hospitalman, had brought the cards to him, panting from the run up from the laboratory, and thrust them into the physician's hands, his face flushed, his voice trembling with excitement, and Doctor Crawford had taken them, and studied them, and felt little, cold teeth of fear begin gnawing at his stomach—

Suddenly he jumped from the relaxer, and started down the darkened corridor toward the Skipper's cabin. He saw the light over the hatch, indicating that the Skipper was in, and his hand shook as he rang the bell. An impossible thing to take to the Skipper—and yet, he knew he had no choice.

Captain Robert Jaffe looked up as the doctor entered the cabin, and his round, dark face broke into a grin. The doctor bent deeply to avoid banging his head in the hatchway, and walked across to the Skipper's desk, his huge body cramped and incongruous in the tiny cabin. Try as he would, he couldn't muster a smile, and he saw Captain Jaffe's eyes grow serious as he sank tiredly into a relaxer. "What is it, Doc?"

"We've got trouble, Bob." The doctor's voice was heavy in the tiny room.

Jaffe looked at him sharply. "Trouble? After this trip?" He grinned again, and leaned back easily. "Don't be silly. What kind of trouble?"

The doctor stretched his long legs uneasily, shifting the cards in his hands. "Bad trouble," he growled. "We've got an extraordinary man aboard, Bob."

The Captain shrugged, raising his eyebrows. "You should be used to it by this time," he chuckled. "We have eighty extraordinary men aboard. That's why they came on this trip—"

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The doctor shook his head, scowling. "I don't mean *that* kind of extraordinary. I mean downright unbelievable. Bob, we've got a man on this ship, walking around, robust and healthy, who *ought to be dead.*"

Jaffe frowned, and tapped a cigarette on his thumb. "That's an odd thing for a doctor to say," he said cautiously. "What do you mean?"

Crawford waved the grey cards at him. "It's right here," he said. "These are lab reports. As you know, I ordered a complete routine physical examination on every man aboard, the day after we blasted from Venus. A normal procedure—we had to be sure that nothing had been picked up by the exploring parties, or anybody else. Among other things, we ran complete lab studies on each of the men—urine, blood chemistry, so forth. We got every man on board into the lab within two days after blasting, and took blood samples from them. And we got some remarkable results."

Jaffe drew on his cigarette, watching the doctor impatiently.

"There are eighty-one men on the ship," the doctor continued. "Of these, eighty presented a clean bill of health, absolutely negative reports on everything. But one man was slightly different." He tapped the cards slowly with a slender finger. "One man showed everything normal—blood count, chlorides, calcium, albumin-globulin ration—everything just the way it should be. Then we ran his blood sugar." The doctor stretched his leg, regarding his toe closely. "This man didn't have any blood sugar," he said quietly. "Not a trace."

CAPTAIN Jaffe stiffened, his eyes suddenly wide. "Now wait a minute—I'm no doctor, but even *I* know—"

"—that a man can't live without any blood sugar." The doctor smiled wryly and nodded his head. "You're so right. But that wasn't all! After we couldn't find any blood sugar, we ran a test for blood creatinin. That's a protein-breakdown product, rapidly disposed of, and if it ever gets as high as 10 milligrams per hundred cc's of blood, the patient is in trouble. I've *never* seen a creatinin higher than 25, and that man was dead when the blood was drawn. A man with a creatinin level that high *has* to be dead, he *couldn't* be alive—" He paused for a moment, wiping a trickle of sweat from his forehead. "This man's test ran 135—"

Jaffe stared at the doctor, puffing his cigarette nervously, finally smashing it out in the ashtray with a scowl. Leaning over the desk, he took the lab cards, glancing over them silently. "This couldn't be a mistake?" His voice was tense, and he looked up at the doctor, his face white. "A laboratory error, maybe? Something wrong with the reagents you used, one of the men fouling up, something like that?"

"Not a chance," said the doctor tiredly. "We got those reports yesterday, and of course I sent for the man. And in he walked, happy as you please, right into the laboratory. Pink cheeks, good respiration—I took more blood from him. I did the chemistry myself, and had Jensen check it for me. I didn't like

Bad Penny

CONJECTURE as to the possible shapes of aliens from other worlds has led up many fascinating byways. One of the scariest, of course, is the alien who can assume any shape, including the imitation of a human so exactly as to defy detection. Here is such a story which offers a puzzle:

You are one of a crew of a space ship. You have reason to believe one of the crew members—don't look now—but it seems as if . . . he's not what he seems. . . . An alien? Deadly? Is it find him or die? And how do you go about asking a man you've known intimately for months or years if he isn't a copy of himself?

—*The Editor*

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what I found. The second blood, from top to bottom, was *perfectly normal—*"

Jaffe's fingers trembled. "Look," he said, after a long pause. "Can a man's blood chemistry change itself like that—so suddenly?"

Doctor Crawford shook his head slowly, scowling. "I'm afraid it can't. Not by any stretch of coincidence. But it did. No more than twenty hours elapsed from the time the first sample was taken to the time the last was drawn. No mixing of samples—they were identified with the man by number and fingerprint. Both came from the same man's veins." He shook his head, staring at the Skipper unhappily. "There's no way to beat it—"

The intercom buzzed sharply at Jaffe's elbow. He picked up the receiver, and his face whitened as the metallic voice rasped in his ear. "Righto," he snapped. "We'll be right up." He snapped down the earpiece and turned back to the doctor, sudden fright in his wide grey eyes. "Doc, you're on to something, this time. Something rotten. A man just died, up in the Navigation shack. A man named Donald Shaver."

II

THE MAN was dead. Of that there was no doubt. Doctor Crawford buttoned up his shirt front, shaking his head, and breathed a tired sigh. "Scotty—I'm sorry," he said to the tall blond man. "He was dead when you called."

The tall Scot stared at the inert form on the deck, opening and closing his fists helplessly. "But Doc—he couldn't be! He was all right this morning—I'd swear to it. I saw him almost all day, and he didn't even look sick until about twenty minutes ago."

The Captain jammed his hands into his pockets nervously. "What does it look like, Doc?" he said quietly.

The doctor motioned the other men out of the cramped navigation shack. Then he turned to Jaffe, scowling. "I don't know. It doesn't look like anything *I* ever saw before." He looked up sharply. "Have those lab reports come up yet?"

The Captain handed him a grey card, and he took it eagerly; then his eyes narrowed as he read it carefully. "Blood sugar zero, creatinin level over 130," he said bluntly. "The man should be dead."

Jaffe's face was white. "Then this was the man you spoke of? I thought you said he had changed back to normal."

The doctor scowled at the crumpled form on the floor. "Sorry, skipper. This isn't the man."

Jaffe blinked. "*Not* the man! But who—?"

"The man I spoke of was named Wescott. This man's physical was perfectly normal."

Jaffe walked across the room and stared out the port, his heavy shoulders hunched forward. A lock of iron grey hair fell across his forehead, and when he turned back to the doctor there was a frightened, crushed look on his broad face. "Doc—we slipped up somewhere. We must have. Some sort of disease sneaked past our sterile control—"

"Nonsense!" Dr. Crawford's voice was sharp. "We set out culture plates before a single man left the ship on Venus, and found them all negative. We had men on the surface, without protective covering of any sort, for three whole months while we explored, cleared every one with ultraviolet irradiation before he came back on board, and no disease appeared. For three months nothing developed. Now we have this. Does that sound like a disease to you?"

The Captain shivered. "That was Venus we were exploring, not Terra." His eyes widened in fear. "I've seen those ships, Doc—other ships that picked up plagues—like that one that came back from Titan, the one they burned last month. A virus that ate out their lungs and spread through the ship in six hours. *Think,* Doc—"

The doctor wasn't listening to him. Quite suddenly he had bent over the

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man on the deck, examining his eyes and ears closely. For a long moment he stared blankly at the man's arm, then slapped his thigh and cursed. "How very stupid," he muttered. "I *thought* I'd seen this guy—"

Jaffe looked at the doctor sharply. "What do you mean?"

For the first time real alarm was in the doctor's eyes. He sprang up for the deck suddenly. *"Let me see those cards again!"*

He examined them closely, checking and counterchecking them against the cards in his pockets. "Incredible!" he muttered. "Bob, this is no disease!"

"But if this man and Wescott were exposed, and this man dies—"

The doctor shook his head violently. "No, no, no. You're on the wrong track. They *weren't* both exposed." He pointed to the still form on the floor. "This man never got close to the surface of Venus, nor to any of the conditions the other men met. This man was in sickbay since the third day after we blasted from Terra, with a topping good case of infectius mononucleosis. He was restricted to bed all the time we were roosting on Venus. I gave him his last shot yesterday morning. *He never left the ship.*"

Jaffe looked at the doctor, his eyes wide. "Then I don't understand—"

"I think I do. Maybe I understand too well. I have a powerful desire to see Roger Wescott." His voice trembled in the stiff air of the cabin. "We've got something loose on this ship, all right. But it isn't any disease."

ON THROUGH space the great ship rushed, its hull-plates clanging as they settled themselves in a million little tolerances for the unaccustomed strain of passage. The third night-period had just begun, so the doctor turned on the wall light in his small cabin, and began to prepare the coffee mix.

Captain Jaffe paced the cabin several times, nervously, and finally sank into a relaxer. He heard the spoon chink with a domestic ring on the coffee mug, and then he exploded, his heavy face red. "Dammit, Doc, how can you stand there and make coffee? This ship is in danger like we've never seen before—"

"Right!" snapped Dr. Crawford. "Too much danger to rush in without thinking."

Jaffe puffed in exasperation. "But we have to act fast! A disease can spread through the ship and kill us all—"

The doctor broke out a bottle of rum and poured some in the captain's coffee. "Quiet down," he said softly. "You're getting jumpy."

Jaffe sipped the hot liquid. "I can't help but get jumpy," he growled. "This is my ship, and I'm responsible for these men—and this wretched trip was enough to make any skipper jumpy." He looked up, his eyes pleading. "Tell me, Doc. What impressed you most about this whole trip?"

The gaunt man tinkered with the coffee for a moment without answering. "Hard to say," he said at length. "Probably the quietness of it all."

Jaffee snorted. "Exactly! This trip has been the dullest, the most commonplace, the most ordinary space mission ever undertaken. Look at it. We start off with a hand-picked crew, carefully chosen to avoid trouble: mental trouble, physical trouble, marital trouble. Everything. We have a quiet, dull passage from Terra to Venus, land within five minutes of calculated landing time. Pretty good for a passage taking three objective weeks. So we settle down to our job, which is to explore and report on the planet Venus. We set out culture plates, bring them in negative. Test the atmosphere, find it light, but conveniently breathable. Climate is hot, but tolerable. So we go out, and what do we find? Nothing. Men go out, explore, sweat, come back in and eat a hearty dinner. Life forms? None. Plant life? Totally absent. Valuable minerals? Dead blank." His voice rose angrily. "We take pictures, write reports, pack up and leave. For all we learned we might as well have stayed home. And now, three

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days out on the homebound route, and a disease breaks out. It doesn't wash, Doc."

"It sure doesn't," snapped the doctor angrily. "For one thing, this is no disease we're dealing with. Get that straight. No disease, Skipper, nothing like it."

Jaffe scowled. "If you weren't the ship's doctor, I'd say you were blind. What do you think Shaver died of? Homesickness?"

The doctor sank down in a chair, and his voice was tense. "Look. Human metabolism is human metabolism. A human being can somehow manage to adjust his metabolism to a perfectly amazing variety of conditions, but there are some things a human metabolism simply cannot do. Take blood sugar, for instance. There is no possible chance under the stars that a living man's blood sugar can go to zero. If his level goes down to a third or a quarter of normal, the man goes into coma. Long before it reaches zero, the man is dead. Not sometimes, always. There's no way of getting around it: *a human being can't live without blood sugar.*"

CRAWFORD stood up and refilled his cup. "The same goes for blood creatinin level," he continued, his voice intense in the stillness of the cabin. "Creatinin is the last breakdown product of nitrogen metabolism in the human body. It it appears in a man's blood stream in any quantity, it means the man's excretory functions are breaking down, and he's being poisoned by accumulated waste products. A man would be dead long before his creatinin level could reach an outlandish point like 135 milligrams. A man simply couldn't build up such a concentration in his system, and stay alive."

Jaffe's scowl deepened. "But surely some disease—something completely alien—"

"Never!" The doctor's voice was brittle. "It isn't a matter of a new phenomenon appearing, skipper. It isn't an arbitrary matter at all. It's a matter of rank impossibility. *It could never happen to a human metabolic system!*"

The skipper's face was grey. Doctor Crawford sat in silence for a long moment, watching the blackness of space through the observation panel. Every star now seemed as bright as the next, but he knew that soon Terra would be looming clear and green in the viewscreen, and the men would be excited and happy to be nearing home. The ship was silent, except for the subsonic undercurrent of the surging engines, the barely perceptible throbbing of the entire giant hull, the occasional bang or squeak of the massive hull plates, crying out their torment to the empty spaces. The ship was very much alone there, the doctor thought, a sliver of human-made alloy hurtling at unthinkable velocity across untravelled reaches of space.

The horror of aloneness often came to Dr. Crawford, here on that infinitesimal island of metal, but it was always padded by the happy certainty that a few short days would bring him home, that solid ground would once more meet his feet with solid assurance. But now—a chill of fear ran up his spine. "It won't do, skipper," he burst out angrily. "This is no disease. It couldn't be." He looked straight into Jaffe's frightened face. "There's only one other possible conclusion. I don't know *what* Roger Wescott is now. But he isn't a human being."

III

JAFFE was on his feet, his eyes blazing. "Oh, now look, Doc. This is insane! Of all the idiotic—" he broke off, spluttering. "I was under the impression that you were a competent physician—"

The doctor's face went red. "Sit down," he snapped. "What do you want me to do? Run out and give everyone shots, maybe? Shots for what? Can you tell me?" He paused, visibly fighting for control. "Look beyond your nose,

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skipper. Just suppose that Venus wasn't quite so dead as we thought. Oh, an insane idea, no doubt, but just suppose there *was* life there—intelligent life, clever, thoughtful, resourceful. Suppose we *didn't* arrive unannounced and unwelcomed, but were carefully observed, all the time we were exploring and studying there, by life forms that didn't care, for some reason, to make their presence known. Just suppose that the parts of Venus which we saw were areas which had been carefully prepared for us to see, so that we would see nothing, and detect nothing, and learn nothing, and go home as empty handed as we came." The doctor spread his hands before him, leaning forward in the relaxer. His eyes narrowed at the Captain's pale face.

"And just suppose, for the sake of argument, that these life forms had no particular rigid anatomy, like we have. Perhaps they were just some sort of jelly-like protoplasm, capable of changing to fit whatever conditions they might meet. Perhaps they could copy anything they wanted to copy, and sat watching us right under our noses, looking like rocks, looking like sand, like puddles—maybe even like *men*—"

Jaffe's face was white, scowling. He pushed his hair from his forehead, and his eyes were more frightened than angry. "Garbage," he growled weakly. "I saw that planet with my own eyes. There was nothing there."

The doctor nodded angrily, his voice urgent. "Sure, call it garbage—but suppose it were true, suppose these—Venusians—wanted to know more about *our* planet, wanted to study us, wanted to study our spaceship, wanted to examine our homeland. How would they do it? Maybe one of them could come aboard, looking like a man. Maybe one of them killed Roger Wescott, out there on the sand somewhere, and came aboard this ship, looking like him, copying his appearance, copying his reactions, hoping that we would accept him as Roger Wescott, and take him home. But suppose that he slipped up on the copying job. He might not have known, at first, just how the blood chemistry of a human being was supposed to balance. Perhaps it took time for him to change and copy, and he came aboard, a nice, perfect outer shell, with the inside all mixed up and uncertain. And when 'blood' was drawn from him, the blood was all wrong, somehow. Completely impossible, as blood goes. Perhaps he learned, then, of his mistakes, and tried to cover up—maybe by killing another man, like Shaver, for instance, and copying him, too, and then pretending to die, just like Shaver seemed to die, so that we'd think that it was just some mysterious disease, and spend the rest of our passage home trying to figure it out. Just suppose this were so—"

The skipper rubbed his hands together. "Suppose it *were* so," he growled. "If so, then Wescott—*isn't* Wescott. But how could you ever tell?"

"A good question. We don't know what sort of a counterfeit job this—Venusian—might do. We don't know how thorough it would be, we could only guess how it would get its information. But suppose it walked in on a man's body, studied every nerve and cell, every chemical ratio, every volume ratio, every conscious thought pattern. It could be a flawless copy, looking like him, acting like him, reacting just as he would react, down to the last cell, *being* him, except for a corner of alien mind, thinking, holding fast to an alien identity, moving with alien motives. The counterfeit could be perfect."

The men stared at each other. The drone of the engines came to them faintly in the silence of the cabin, smooth, and steady, and lonely. The captain stared at his hands, and his palms were damp with sweat. When he looked up, the fear in his eyes was bright and terrible. "It would have to be evil, wouldn't it? To do something like this—treacherous, and sly, and evil—"

"Yes."

"And we could carry it back home?"

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"Yes."

Jaffe set down the coffe cup, almost dropping it. His voice was trembling. "Doc, do you believe this is true?"

The doctor leaned forward and snuffed out his cigarette savagely. "Yes," he said quietly. "I'm afraid I do."

"But what can we do?"

There was a long silence. Then the doctor said, "I don't know. I—I just don't know. But I have a hunch I'd like to try on Wescott. I've never heard of a counterfeit yet that couldn't be broken."

THE BOY was about twenty-three, pink-cheeked, with a straight nose and steady blue eyes. He rapped at the entrance to the skipper's cabin, and stepped in, hat in hand, head high. "Roger Wescott, sir," he said. "You sent for me?"

Doctor Crawford stood up, his heavy chin unshaven blue, and shot a warning glance at the skipper's pale face. "*I* sent for you," he said flatly. He motioned the boy to the center of the room. "So you're Roger Wescott." He eyed the boy coldly. An ordinary-looking boy, he thought. Strong-shouldered, healthy looking—"What's your job on this ship, Wescott?"

"I'm a navigator, sir. I work with Scotty McIntire, and—" he hesitated, his voice lowering imperceptibly, "—I did work with Don Shaver."

The doctor shifted the sheaf of papers in his hand. "Special relations expert, it says here in the Specialty Schools report. 'Man is of special value at blasting and landing procedures. Stood high in his class in Navigation.' You got started rather young, didn't you?"

"I started as early as they'd take me. I've always wanted space, sir."

The doctor sank down in a relaxer, his eyes on the boy's face. "You're a fool, Wescott," he said bleakly. "You should have known better than to try sneak thievery in a place like this."

The boy looked up sharply. The cabin was deathly silent, the air suddenly charged with tension. "Sneak—thievery? I—I don't understand?"

"You know exactly what I mean. The collection that was taken up for Shaver's widow—two thousand credits. It was in an envelope on my desk when I left my cabin an hour ago. You entered my cabin five minutes after I had left, and came out again almost immediately. And the money was gone when you left. Don't you think you'd better return it?"

The boy's face flushed, and he turned in confusion to Jaffe, then back to the doctor. "Sir, I don't know what you're talking about. I was *sent* to your cabin, just a little while ago, and you weren't there, so I came out again. I didn't see any money."

The doctor's eyes were scornful. "Sent there, were you? I see. Look, Wescott, somebody saw you go into the cabin. But nobody else went in there. You can make it much easier if you'll just return the money to me. Nothing more will be said—you have my word. I can't really blame you, anybody could buckle at a temptation like that. But we're onto you, and we want the money back."

Wescott spread his hands helplessly. "Doctor, I don't know anything about this—" He turned to Jaffe. "Captain, you've been my skipper as long as I've been in service—you know I wouldn't take any money. I—I *couldn't* steal!"

Jaffe shifted his eyes uneasily. "You heard the doctor, Wescott. I think you'd better come across."

MISERABLY the boy looked from one to the other, face burning, eyes almost brimming. "You don't believe me," he said, his voice tight. "You think I'm lying. I tell you, I didn't *take* any money—how can I give it back? I don't have two thousand credits—"

The doctor slapped the table disgustedly. "All right, Wescott. Get back to duty. We'll order a shakedown of the entire ship. The money's here on board, and we know you took it. We'll find it, and it'll be hard on you when we do."

"But I—"

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"That's all. Get back to duty."

The boy left, his head hanging, his eyes wide with disbelief. He was hardly out of the cabin when Jaffe whirled on the doctor. "Doc, do you have any idea what you're doing to that boy?"

The doctor shrugged his broad shoulders. "It'll be tough, all right. But you'll have to play along with me."

"I *can't* play along with this sort of thing, Doc. I—I didn't realize the implications until I saw the boy, but—this is downright vicious—"

The doctor's eyes blazed. "We're *dealing* with something vicious—can't you get that through your skull? Do you have to see something to be afraid of it? Is radiation burn any less vicious because you can't see it when it happens? Or plague, or polio?" He looked up, his eyes haggard. "Oh, I've thought about this until I'm sick of thinking, and I tell you I'm *scared*, Bob—I'm so scared I can't sleep. This—creature—is here, it's loose on the ship, and we can't even detect it, or prove that it's here. If it were good, or friendly, or peaceable, it would have made itself known from the first, but it didn't do that; can't you see what that implies? It murdered, twice it murdered, and back there on Venus, somewhere, those men are lying dead on a rock, rotting. Two of our crew, Bob. Two men who'll never get home again, who'll never have life again. And this—counterfeit—that we were talking to killed those men."

"But he looked so *normal*. Reacted so perfectly—"

"Look, Bob. Think what it could do on the ship if we don't stop it. We don't know its powers and capabilities. But at least here it's closed in, isolated. What about when we get home, when it could run loose, on the streets—we *can't take it home*, Bob—"

Jaffe scowled. "Then tell the crew, let them be on guard—"

"And lose any chance to trap it? Don't be silly. I think I've got a way to trap it. All I can do is reason and guess, but I think I have a way. Let me try."

Jaffe shivered, and turned back to the desk. "All right," he said, reluctantly. "I'll go along with you. But I hope you're right, Doc. In all the service there's no worse name you can brand on a man than 'thief.'"

"Well, I don't know it."

"Oh, but there is," said the doctor, quietly.

"'*Spy*'," said the doctor.

IV

IN THE mess hall the hum of voices subsided as Captain Jaffe mounted the platform, with Dr. Crawford at his side. His voice rang sharp and clear, resounding on the metal walls.

"I called you men together to tell you that there's a thief among you."

An angry buzz rose from the men. The quiet exchange of wisecracks and remarks suddenly subsided, and all eyes focussed on the skipper.

"The collection taken for your shipmate's widow has been stolen," he continued. The buzz grew louder, more indignant. "Two thousand credits. Someone here took it. If the guilty man will return it, in person, to Doctor Crawford, who had custody of the money, no action will be taken against him, and the man will be allowed to change outfits at the end of this passage."

The men were angry now, whispering excitedly, eying each other sharply.

"One final remark," said the skipper. "Until the money is returned, all movies on the ship are cancelled, and the library and card rooms are locked. If it isn't back by the time we land at Los Alamos, not one man will leave the ship until it is. That's all. You're dismissed."

The men broke up in groups, whispering, gesturing, scowling. Snatches of conversation caught the doctor's ear as he walked down the corridor, and like a sudden blow he realized the irreparable stigma of a thief at large on a ship. The men's voices were indignant, angry:

"Of all the rotten tricks—"

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"Don't suppose whoever took it will give it back, do you?"

"Naw, that never works. A guy that lousy don't have no conscience—"

"What'll Scotty say, do you think?"

"I dunno—but Don was Scotty's buddy. Scotty ain't goin' to like whoever it was took the money. And you know Scotty when he's mad—"

"Yeah, man, do I—"

And as Doctor Crawford walked toward his cabin, he saw Roger Wescott, walking away from the group, his face white.

SCOTTY McINTIRE eased back in the ship's barber's chair, and relaxed as the hot towel went about his face. His huge muscles softened, and he wriggled comfortably down into the chair.

"Heard the latest?" asked the barber.

"No. What's the latest?"

"I got the straight scoop on that money for Shaver's widow. They say Roger Wescott stole it, and won't admit it."

The big Scot stiffened. "Yeah? Who says so?"

The barber picked a stray hair from his sleeve. "I wouldn't want to mention any names, understand, but one of the doc's men saw him go into the doc's cabin when the money was there, and it wasn't there when he came out. Looks kinda funny."

Scotty scowled. "This I don't like," he muttered. "Wipe my face off, like a good laddie."

The barber wiped off the lather, uneasily. "Understand, they haven't proved anything. The kid claims he didn't take it. But you know how it is—he even said once how he wished the collection was for him, instead of Shaver's widow, since he didn't have much cash to celebrate on when he gets home—"

Scotty grunted ominously. "I know how to get proof. It he's the one, he'll speak up soon enough."

"Now, look, Scotty—you don't want to do nothin' hasty—"

"Me?" said Scotty, clenching his fist. "I wouldn't think of doin' anything hasty!"

Doctor Crawford stood alone in his cabin, pacing, his dark eyes staring unseeing at the floor, his mind roving in vast circles, twisting and turning on him, dreaming up unbearable phantom nightmares. Wearily he sank down at the desk, began typing dispiritedly, then ripped out the sheet with a curse and resumed his pacing. He alone was the god of the situation, he alone the Lord High Executioner. For the first time in his life he felt the terrible bleakness of utter aloneness.

It was the only thing he could do, he told himself a thousand times, he *had* to do it, as a doctor, as a human being. But the skipper was right, it was a vicious thing to do. Completely cruel, and heartless, and vicious.

His mind was a whirl of pictures, nightmarish glimpses of Roger Wescott's white, beaten face, the contemptuous faces of the crewmen, the twisted anger in Scotty McIntire's heavy face, the fear and doubt in the Skipper's. If only he could tell them, his mind screamed, tell the crew everything, tell them *why he was doing it*, what they were fighting, if only he could share the burden, somehow—but the burden was all his. He had reasoned it out. He had made the decision, and marked Roger Wescott for the vicious round. It was the only thing, if he was right, if Wescott were an alien, a hateful, sneaking counterfeit of a man lying dead on Venus' sands—

But if he were wrong—

A COLD sweat broke out on his forehead. He could be killing a man, breaking his spirit, twisting a young, fine, useful mind into a persecuted wreck of fear and hate. Roger Wescott could never erase this mark, he would carry it for the rest of his life. . . .

He couldn't be wrong! He glanced nervously at the chronometer on the wall, calculating the few remaining days

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of the passage. He alone had made the decision. He alone had persuaded Jaffe, started this chain, fighting through foggy depths of remote possibility, following a thin, tenuous chain of reasoning, certain to prove him right—or wrong—

Jensen rapped on the door, stuck his head in. "Doc," he said. "You'd better get down to crew's quarters. I think there's going to be trouble—"

The doctor turned swiftly to follow the man, sensing the biting accusation on the Hospitalman's face. Jensen knew the truth, knew Wescott had stolen nothing. Jensen was loyal, but the doctor could read the accusation and contempt in his puzzled eyes.

The bunkroom was silent when the doctor walked in. Nobody even noticed him. Several men sat around, silently, making themselves busy, glancing occasionally with expectation at the tall, blond Scotsman. Roger Wescott quietly slipped to his locker, pulled out a pair of shoes, and started polishing them. Nobody but the doctor looked at him. Nobody said a word.

Scotty McIntire stretched his long, powerful legs on his bunk, glancing at the boy's pale face. "Too bad about Donnie," he said slowly, to nobody in particular.

A boatswain stirred next to him. "Yeah," he said. "Too bad."

"Too bad somebody took that money," said Scotty. "From what he said, his wife is a pretty square gal."

"Yeah, that's what he kept sayin'."

Scotty turned his eyes to Wescott in muted anger. "She sure could have used that money, too, they tell me. Ain't got much, what with Donnie gone, and all." His voice held a dangerous edge.

The room was silent. Dr. Crawford felt the tension mounting, insidiously, like something alive and cruel. Every man had stopped what he was doing, stopped to watch Roger Wescott. Wescott applied the shoe polish, trying to ignore them.

"You know," said Scotty, suddenly, "it beats me how low some guys can get."

"Yeah," said Boats, grimly. "They sure can get low."

"How low can a guy get, Wescott?" He turned sharply to the boy, his eyes cold.

Wescott's face turned chalky. "I dunno," he muttered.

"He don't know," Scotty mocked sarcastically. "What do you think of a guy who'd steal from another man's widow, Wescott? What do you think of a guy like that?"

Wescott threw a murderous glance at the Scot, and applied the polish silently.

"I'm talking to you, Wescott," grated Scotty, sitting up suddenly on the edge of his bunk. "What do you think of a guy like that?"

"I don't know," said Wescott.

"Stealin' from a man is bad enough, but stealin' from a shipmate's widow is reachin' up to touch bottom. It's really rotten." Scotty stood up, towering over the boy, his face twisted into a snarl. With one swipe of his immense paw he sent the shoe banging across the room. "Answer me, Wescott. *What do you think of a guy like that?"*

Wescott looked up, angry tears in his eyes. His fists clenched at his sides, and he glared up at the blond giant. "I don't know," he gritted.

With careful precision, Scotty spat in his face. "You yellow puppy," he said.

Slowly the boy rose from the chair, body tense, cold desperation in his eyes, and smashed his fist into Scotty's face with all his weight. The Scot rocked back, shaken, and drew back his massive fist. Then he lowered it again, twisting his mouth in disgust. "I should dirty my hands," he muttered, and stalked out of the room.

One by one, the other men followed. The doctor walked back toward the sickbay, trembling, his hands white and clenched, fingernails biting deep slices in his palms. He turned into the small laboratory, closed the hatch behind him, and began searching the reagent shelves

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for a small bottle of white powder. His hand closed on it, and he put it into his pocket, breathing heavily, his face wet with perspiration. "Please, don't let me be wrong," he muttered. "Please, please—"

V

THE MAN'S body lay still on the bunk, motionless, asleep. Inside his head, behind the sleeping eyes, a mind shifted, curled, writhed, sending out slender tendrils of thought, a cruel, evil mind. An alien mind, twisting in a morass of hate, vile, virulent, living, it sent out its hateful thoughts, seeking, probing—and from somewhere, in the depths of the throbbing ship, another evil mind replied.

"We have to go back, go back. We're caught, he's on to us—"

"Never!" The other mind shot back, vitriolic.

"But there's still time! Another time period, and we'll be too far, we'd never be able to make it back."

"Traitor! Coward!" the other mind roared its cruel hatred back, twisting in merciless rage. "You should die for such a thought!"

"But he's onto me—the doctor—what's he trying to do? I've copied so carefully, he couldn't spot me—but what's he trying to do?" Fear was mingled in the hatred.

The thought came back, scornful. "He's a dolt, a common clod. He'll never succeed—"

"But he might—we've got to go back—" The fear was stronger now. "I can't tell what he's trying to do, I don't know if I've copied right—"

Sneering, cruel laughter came through in the snaking thoughts. "He isn't on to *me*—he trusts me. Don't be afraid. He's a fool. Think of their land; in just a short while now they'll land. Think of all the warm people, where we can hide and work, *think* how delightful—" the thought bubbled over into a vile, lascivious ecstasy of anticipation— "and soon we'll have them, slaughtered and strapped, and we'll have their ships, to bring the others—"

"But the doctor—we should kill him—"

"No, no—they'd never land the ship. They'd all be suspicious then, they'd burn it before it landed. No, no, the doctor is so clever, let him play his games. Don't be afraid."

"But I think he's cornering me—I don't know how, I just *feel* it—we should go back, *go back*, while we can—"

The hateful mind squirmed and writhed, pouring its poison out in a thousand channels, laughing, sneering. "Don't be afraid. Remember, it only takes one of us—"

JAFFE addressed the doctor sourly. "I hope you're satisfied," he said. "You've got the whole ship upside down. They've been plaguing poor Wescott 'til he doesn't know which way is up, and everyone on the ship is edgy. What's the point to all this, Doc? Can't you call it quits?"

The doctor smiled wryly, his heavy face tired. "Everyone but me and thee," he chuckled. "How about you, Bob? Are *you* edgy?"

"You're damned well told I'm edgy!" Jaffe exploded. "This thing is getting on my nerves, Doc." He ran a hand through his hair. "If I could see the point to it, it would be a different thing, but this is going too far. I haven't slept since it started, and every time I see Wescott he gives me a look that makes me feel like a Judas—" He reached out to take a cigarette lighter from the doctor's hand.

Dr. Crawford jerked his hand back as he'd been stung. *"Don't touch me!"* he rasped, his eyes wide with horror.

Jaffe blinked, staring at the doctor. "I just wanted a light, Doc—"

The doctor let out a little breath, and shamefacedly tossed the lighter to Jaffe. "Sorry," he muttered. "I guess I'm edgy, too. I'm having nightmares, I'm scared

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of myself and everyone else on the ship. Silly, but this business has made me jumpy as a cat—" He looked up at the captain, saw his startled face ease into a relieved smile.

"I guess you *are* jumpy," said Jaffe. "I still don't see the point to all this."

"Look, Bob, you're forgetting. Roger Wescott is dead. He's been dead quite some time now, out there in the steaming sun on Venus. Never forget that, not for a minute."

Jaffe shook his head wearily. "You only *think* he's dead—"

"He's *got* to be dead," the doctor snapped. "I *can't* be wrong—look, this won't go on for long. All I need is a few more hours, and some radioactive bismuth, and I'll have the answer." He stood up and started for the door.

"Doc," said Jaffe. "Can't you at least tell me what you're looking for?"

"Sorry," the doctor grinned at him. "After all, how do I know that you're not a monster, too?"

Fool! his mind screamed at him, as he started back for the sickbay. Fool, fool, fool, to have made such a slip! The doctor wiped his forehead, self-incrimination pouring through his mind. To have let such a thing happen, to have revealed a clue to the nightmare thought that had been growing in his mind since the very first day the trouble had started, to have even *hinted* at the idea which had grown in his mind, cherished and secretly nurtured, blossoming slowly into a full-blown, horrible realization—that Roger Wescott was not necessarily the only alien aboard—how could he have made such a slip?

Swiftly Crawford's mind reviewed the interview just past, and he recalled the look of startled surprise on Jaffe's face, and then the slightly pleased smile that had replaced it. The doctor chuckled, feeling easier. Jaffe was frightened, too, and probably felt like a fool being on edge, probably felt a little foolish even admitting in his mind that the doctor might be right, that Roger Wescott might *be* an alien. So Jaffe probably was pleased, deep in his heart, to see the doctor jumpy also. Jaffe probably wouldn't think about it any further, but still, he couldn't afford such an error. *Nobody* must know what he suspected. . . .

He heard a footfall in the corridor above the sickbay, and looked up from the chart he was writing. At the top of the ladder-shaft he saw Roger Wescott adjust his anti-grav rheostat for light fall, and drift slowly down to the sickbay. The doctor looked at him, his eyes narrowing.

He felt a sudden pity sweep through him, a desperate self-reproach. The boy was pale, deathly pale, and his eyes were hollow, as though he were haunted by nightmares. The doctor felt the pity grow, and sternly clamped it off in his mind. It had to be all, or nothing.

WESCOTT stared at him for a long moment, and then said: "Doctor, I've had all this I can take. I don't know what you've got against me, that you insist on driving this home. I didn't take the money from your desk, and you know I didn't. I want you to call it off."

The doctor leaned back, raising his eyebrows. "Call what off?" he asked innocently.

The boy's hollow eyes blazed bitterly, and he clenched his fist. "This thief campaign. It isn't true. You know it isn't true. You're the one who started it, and you're the only man on the ship who can stop it. I've had enough."

"Then why don't you give back the money?"

The boy's jaw tightened. "Doc, if you're trying to crack me up, you're doing a good job. I haven't heard a civil word for the past week. I can't stand it much longer."

The doctor sneered. "You've come to the wrong man for civil words, Wescott. Try somewhere else."

Wescott bit his lip, his face white. "I can't take much more of this, Doc. If you don't call it off, I think I'll go loopey—"

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The doctor closed the record book with a slam. He shrugged, smiling unpleasantly at the boy. "All right, Wescott," he said eagerly. "Go ahead. Go loopey. I'm not stopping you."

Tears came to the boy's eyes. He turned and left the room.

The doctor sighed, running a hand through his hair. He stared at the empty desk top for a long time, then withdrew the small bottle from a drawer. It was nearly empty; only a small amount of the white dust remained in the bottom. "You'd better not fail me, baby," he whispered, shaking his head.

"All hands, stand by. Prepare for deceleration in three hours." The PA system boomed the skipper's command three times, and lapsed into silence.

The doctor stepped briskly into Captain Jaffe's cabin. His heavy shoulders were drooping, and there were great hollows under his eyes. He looked more like a zombie than a human being, but as he carefully closed the door and checked the visiphone switches, a light of grim victory burned in his eyes. He dropped a large black envelope on Jaffe's desk, and collapsed into a relaxer. "I see we'll be landing in a few hours," he said. "It looks like I was just in time." He pointed to the envelope. "That's the goods, Bob. I've got him cold."

"Wescott?"

The doctor nodded grimly. "Wescott. Cold. I just ordered the man down to clean the starboard space-lock. You'd better come with me now, because I want you to see this."

Jaffe opened the envelope carefully, and drew out the contents. *"This* puts the finger on Wescott?"

"It sure does. Come with me now. I'll explain later."

The two men checked with the corridor officer outside the space-lock, and sent him on an errand. Together they peered through the heavy glass panel into the pressure chamber. Roger Wescott was there, scrubbing down the metal deck with a brush and soapy water.

Like a cat the doctor clamped down the hatch lock, and savagely pressed a stud on the wall. A red light went on in the chamber, and the exhaust machinery whirred into motion. Wescott looked up suddenly, eyes wide with alarm, and he sprang to his feet. "Doc!" he shouted, his voice coming thin and brittle through the panel. "Doc! Throw that switch! I haven't got a suit on—"

Jaffe's breath hissed, and he stared at the doctor, paralyzed. "What are you doing?" he yelped. "You'll kill him."

"Just watch," growled the doctor. The man in the chamber was standing tense now, terror in his face. "Doc!" he shouted, desperately. "Doc! Turn it off. Stop it, Doc, stop it!" His eyes were wide with fear, and his face twisted into a grimace of sheer, impotent, screaming rage. "Stop it, stop it, I'm chocking—" He banged at the hatch with his fist until the blood ran and smeared on the hatch—and became something different from blood. His hands went to his throat, and he sank to his knees, as the pressure gauge went down and down, and he twisted on the deck, coughing. Suddenly red blood poured from his nostrils, and he convulsed on the floor, and lay still.

And his body began changing, melting, sharply. Losing the definition of pink cheeks and blond hair, fusing and running into a large globule of gooey red jelly. The arms melted away, and the legs, until the mass looked like a giant reddish amoeba. Then suddenly it drew itself into a roundish lump, quivered for a moment, and then was still.

The doctor tore his eyes from the panel, shook his head hard, and sank down to sit on the deck as his tired muscles gave way. "You see," he said wearily, "I was *not* wrong—"

"No," breathed the skipper. "You weren't."

VI

I NEVER saw a counterfeit," said Dr. Crawford, "that couldn't be broken, if

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you went about it the right way. Usually there's a flaw in design: the copy isn't perfect, or the wrong material was used. But here we had a different case. We had a counterfeit *man*. Common sense and medical reasoning told me that we couldn't possibly be dealing with anything else *but* a counterfeit man, yet such a perfect counterfeit that microscopic study of his tissues revealed no flaw. It looked like a tough nut to crack."

The doctor poured himself a cup of coffee, and offered one to Jaffe. "But there were some assumptions we could make," he continued. "We could assume that the creature—the Venusian—had copied Wescott, and then moved part of himself into Shaver's form in order to decoy us when we caught him short in his copying job. We could see that he made a perfect morphological copy. He must have copied Wescott's neural circuits, too, and assumed the proper reactions to whatever situations arose. It was really neat. When the situation demanded that he be scared, he was scared. When he should have been angry, he was angry. Situation indicated indignation, he was indignant. All this came from Wescott's mind, when he copied it. But there were some things he couldn't have gotten from Wescott's mind. Some things that even Wescott wouldn't have been aware of, some things even Wescott's mind couldn't control.

"The creature had Wescott's brain to think with, and saw the world through Wescott's eyes. But his own protective mechanisms, maintained his own unconscious reaction patterns. There was one thing he couldn't copy.

"The monster was faced with a serious problem when 'Wescott' was accused of thievery. He reacted beautifully, following strictly the lines that Wescott's mind would have dictated. *To Wescott.* He was worried, indignant, pitiable, angry—everything, just exactly right. He ate the meals provided for him with distaste, just as Wescott would have. He had to follow the *functions* of Wescott, the thief-accused, down to the last letter."

The doctor smiled and pointed to the large black negatives lying on the desk on top of the large black envelope. "But those, slipped under his mattress at night, spotted him cold. There was one thing he missed that no *human* nervous system would have missed. The monster tripped himself up because he didn't know enough about the *function* of the model he was copying. He *didn't* have one thing that every other man on the whole ship had before this thievery business had run its course."

Jaffe pointed to the negatives, understanding dawning in his eyes. "You mean—?"

"Exactly," smiled the doctor. "He *didn't* have indigestion."

NOW TERRA loomed huge in the screen, greener and brighter than ever since their departure for Venus. The ship was decelerating full, now, the crew standing by their landing stations, each to his own specialized job, waiting, impatience throbbing through their minds, driving out the strain and hatred of the past weeks—to be home, at last, no matter what—that was what counted more than anything else in the world.

Dr. Crawford ran down the dark corridor toward the rear of the ship, black envelope under his arm, his mind forcing him on to greater speed. He had tried to make it sound final, when he talked to Jaffe, to make sure he considered the problem closed. He couldn't afford having stories getting around now, couldn't afford the skipper throwing a wrench into the machinery. It was a shame to leave Bob Jaffe out in the cold, but he knew he couldn't place the skipper in any different category from the rest of the crew. . . .

Crawford reached the lifeboat locks, worked the hatch for a moment, and swung into the small, musty launching quarters. With a pocket flashlight he searched the lock, finally spotting the

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launching switches, and hurriedly fiddled with a screwdriver, methodically shorting them out. All but one. Hastily he glanced over his shoulder, fearful that someone—or *something*—would suddenly enter the lock with him. Finally the whole raft of eight lifeboats were jimmied so they would require hours of repair. With a last mental check, the doctor swung up and into the ninth ship, threw himself into the cockpit with frenzied speed, and gently, silently, began easing it toward the opening port. There was no sound but the small, eager hum of the tiny motor as the ship nosed silently into black space, and then with a whoosh like a relieved sigh, he was free of the ship, sliding into an arrow-like descent toward the warm green of Terra.

They were vulnerable, he kept telling himself. He had spotted an alien aboard, out-thought it, and trapped it. That meant they *weren't* sure, that meant he could trap another one. Or two, or three—he shuddered, remembering the wild, hateful rage in the Wescott-monster's eyes as it had died. Hate-filled eyes, deadly to the last. And it had been by such a narrow chance that he had spotted them at all. . . .

And it would have been so foolish to assume that *only one* came aboard—

An hour later the lifeboat settled gently down to a receiving lock in Los Alamos Spaceport. A flurry of excitement, a raising of eyebrows, a few hurriedly spoken words, and he was on the underground shuttle, speeding with an escort toward the office of the Spaceport Commandant.

THE HUGE SHIP rested on its tail fins in the Spaceport, pointing its silvery nose to the sky, standing like some wonderful bird poised for flight. Dr. Crawford squinted up and down her long slender shape as he walked down the winding ramp to the landingway, and marvelled for the thousandth time at the sleek, perfect beauty of her gleaming hull.

Running up the hull, a Gantry crane was creaking, moving higher and higher, toward the main port locks. Standing on the crane were two green-uniformed space-police. They looked up at the lock with grim faces, hugging the deadly sonic-shocker guns purposefully to their sides.

Dr. Crawford walked over to the Police Commander's field desk. "Did they get the Commandant's message?"

The Commander nodded. "You're Dr. Crawford? Yes sir, they did. We've held a copy for you." He held up the blue paper slip. The doctor opened it up and read it, a grim smile growing on his lips:

ALL OFFICERS AND MEN OF VENUS EXPLORATORY SHIP WILL BE ESCORTED UNDER ARMED GUARD TO THE SPACE HOSPITAL FOR ISOLATION AND OBSERVATION AT THE RECOMMENDATION AND UNDER THE DIRECT SUPERVISION OF THE SHIP'S DOCTOR: STOP
ABEL FRANCIS: SPACEPORT COMMANDANT

The doctor smiled and glanced up at the crane. Three crewmen had stepped from the ship, faces frightened and bewildered, moving like timid sheep out onto the platform. He heard the dull clang as the crane started again, and began its labored descent.

It had been a tough nut, indeed, he thought. They were sly, treacherous, evil, but they could be caught. Every man on the ship would be tested, rigorously, with every test he could devise, to trap anyone who could possibly be an alien. He knew he had the advantage. There were things they couldn't know, ways they could be trapped, every one. It would take time, and perseverance, but it could be done. He breathed a sigh. If only he had had time, and equipment, to test everyone as he had Wescott. But it didn't really make too much difference. There were other ways. Every single man would come off the ship under guard, and there couldn't be a slip-up.

The Police Commander tapped his

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arm. "That's it, Doctor. They're all off."

The doctor looked at him sharply. "You're sure? Everybody?"

"Everybody. I've checked the list against faces and fingerprints. What do we do now?"

The doctor considered for a moment. "I'll have to go aboard for my records and notes—" He didn't mention the glob of reddish jelly, drying in the starboard lock. He couldn't wait to see what the lab would find in an analysis of that—"Just keep the guard here, and see that nobody else tries to go aboard." He stepped on the crane, heard the motor start, and felt the platform begin to rise. With a little sigh he glanced down on the busy metropolis of Los Alamos, his eye singling out the thin, straight strip of Coral Street, running out to the suburbs, to his home, his wife. It wouldn't be long, now—just deposit the records with the Commandant, and he could go home, and sleep, and sleep. . . .

The lock stood open, and he stepped into the darkened ship. The old, familiar throbbing of the engines was gone now, leaving a nostalgic emptiness about the ship. He turned down the corridor toward his cabin, his footsteps echoing down the empty corridors, hollowly.

He stopped. The echo of his last step resounded, and faded away, and he stood, stock still, tense. *Something,* he thought—some sound, some feeling. . . .

He peered down the dark, tomblike corridor, probing, listening, and sweat poured from his forehead and palms. And then he heard it again, the faintest sigh of sound, minute, like the carefully subdued shuffling of a foot.

There was someone else on the ship . . .

Fool, his mind screamed, *you should never have come aboard,* and he sucked in a shaking breath. Who? No one could be aboard, but somebody was—who?

Somebody that knew about Wescott, his mind churned back. The whole story about Wescott. Somebody that knew there were aliens aboard, someone who knew why the crew was being guarded, someone who was afraid to go ashore, who didn't dare, because he knew you would spot him sooner or later. Somebody who knew what you suspected—

IT SEEMED that his mind exploded into a blinding rage of hate and horror and fear as he realized. He screamed *"Jaffe!"* and the word echoed and reechoed down the corridor, dissolving into idiotic laughter before it died away. The doctor turned and bolted back the way he had come, back toward the port lock, toward the crane, toward safety, and he saw the heavy lock swing shut before his eyes, heard the automatic lock slough down against the hull-pocket that held it.

"Jaffe!" he screamed. "It won't work! You can't get away, do you hear me? I've told them everything, they know there's another of you in the crew. The ship is guarded, airtight, and you're *trapped!*" He stood, trembling, his heart racing, until the tumble of words died out, and there was silence again.

He choked back a sob, and wiped sweat from his forehead. He had forgotten what they could do, forgotten that one of them could copy two people. He'd forgotten Donald Shaver, and how he had died, a copy just the same as Wescott. The Captain had left the ship with the rest of the crew, but part of him was still here, still looking like Jaffe, still waiting—

For what?

Carefully, with cold determination, the doctor fingered the sonic shocker in his pocket. Then he moved down the corridor, silently, peering cautiously ahead into the gloom of the passageway, searching for some sign of movement. Dimly he realized that the alien was helpless, as long as it was on the ship, it would be racking its brains, trying to figure a way, some system for getting off, or it would be useless. He knew there was only one thing to do. He gripped the shocker grimly. The alien would have no mercy. He'd have to spot it first. . . .

He heard the sound again, plainly, a

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scurrying on the deck above. Swiftly he ran down the corridor, in the same direction as the sound, reaching the ladder, and trying to mute his wild panting. Above him he heard a hatch clang open, the hatch to the skipper's cabin, and then he heard it clang shut again.

He breathed a short sigh. There was no exit from the captain's cabin but into the corridor above him. Slowly, silently, he eased up the ladder, peeked over the edge of the deck, and saw nothing in the gloom of the passageway. A bright line of light came from around the door—

He slid against the wall, shocker in hand, and eased over toward the thin line of light. "Come out, Jaffe!" he roared. "You'll never be able to get off this ship. They'll take it aloft, and they'll burn it out, and you with it."

He heard nothing. With his foot he gave the hatch a shove, saw it bang inward, and his hand went around the edge of the door, the shocker sending screaming bolts of energy round the room. He peered around the edge, and saw the entire interior of the cabin, empty—

A small cry left his lips, and he half turned before the bolt hit his hand, sending a jolt of fiery pain coursing up to his elbow. His shocker dropped to the floor with a clang, as he grasped his injured hand. With a scream he whirled on the huge, gaunt figure standing in the door, saw the black hair and the hollow eyes, the long thin jaw with the black stubble, the slow, easy smile spreading across the full lips—

He screamed, again and again, as he backed away, eyes wild with fear. He screamed, and he knew as he screamed that nobody could hear him.

He was staring—*into his own face.*

The Gantry crane creaked its weariness to the world as the platform moved lower and lower, and Dr. Crawford stepped to the ground. He grinned at the Police Commander, and rubbed his stubbled chin. "I'm for home and a shave," he said. "I'll be back tomorrow for the final disposition of the records. Better not let anything be disturbed until then." The Commander nodded and turned back to the field desk.

The doctor walked slowly up the ramp to the Spaceport Building, through the lobby, and out onto the street. There he paused, feeling his feet turning almost instinctively toward the Coral Street subway.

But he didn't start for the Coral Street subway, to take him out to the suburbs, to his home, to his wife.

Instead, with a curious eager brightness in his eyes, he turned onto the downtown thoroughfare, and vanished into the crowds of people toward the heart of the city. . . .

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SLAN

By A. E. VAN VOGT

In the Summer FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE

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Lock your door, friend, and go hide in a closet—that nice, little, pink-cheeked man is experimenting again!

The Middle of the Week After Next

By Murray Leinster

IT CAN be reported that Mr. Thaddeus Binder is again puttering happily around the workshop he calls his laboratory, engaged again upon something that he — alone — calls philosophic-scientific research. He is a very nice, little, pink-cheeked person, Mr. Binder — but maybe somebody ought to stop him.

Mr. Steems could be asked for an opinion. If the matter of Mr. Binder's last triumph is mentioned in Mr. Steems' hearing, he will begin to speak, rapidly and with emotion. His speech will grow impassioned; his tone will grow shrill and hoarse at the same time; and presently he will foam at the mouth. This occurs though he is

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not aware that he ever met Mr. Binder in person, and though the word "compenetrability" has never fallen upon his ears. It occurs because Mr. Steems is sensitive. He still resents it that the newspapers described him as the Taxi Monster—a mass murderer exceeding even M. Landru in the number of his victims. There is also the matter of Miss Susie Blepp, to whom Mr. Steems was affianced at the time, and there is the matter of Patrolman Cassidy, whose love-life was rearranged. Mr. Steems' reaction is violent. But the background of the episode was completely innocent. It was even chastely intellectual.

The background was Mr. Thaddeus Binder. He is a plump little man of sixty-four, retired on pension from the Maintenance Department of the local electric light and power company. He makes a hobby of a line of research that seems to have been neglected. Since his retirement, Mr. Binder has read widely and deeply, quaffing the wisdom of men like Kant, Leibnitz, Maritain, Einstein, and Judge Rutherford. He absorbs philosophical notions from those great minds, and then tries to apply them practically at his workbench. He does not realize his success. Definitely!

Mr. Steems drove a taxicab in which Mr. Binder rode, just after one such experiment. The whole affair sprang from that fact. Mr. Binder had come upon the philosophical concept of compenetrability. It is the abstract thought that—all experience to the contrary notwithstanding—two things might manage to be in the same place at the same time. Mr. Binder decided that it might be true. He experimented. In Maintenance, before his retirement, he had answered many calls in the emergency truck, and he knew some things that electricity on the loose can do. He knows some other things that he doesn't believe yet. In any case, he used this background of factual data in grappling with a philosophical concept. He made a device. He tried it. He was delighted with the results. He then set out to show it to his friend Mr. McFadden.

IT WAS about five o'clock in the afternoon of May 3rd, 1951. Mr. Binder reached the corner of Bliss and Kelvin Streets, near his home. He had a paper-wrapped parcel under his arm. He saw Mr. Steems' cab parked by the curb. He approached and gave the address of his friend Mr. McFadden, on Monroe Avenue. Mr. Steems looked at him sourly. Mr. Binder got into the cab and repeated the address. Mr. Steems snapped, "I got it the first time!" He pulled out into the traffic, scowling. Everything was normal.

Mr. Binder settled back blissfully. The inside of the cab was dingy and worn, but he did not notice. The seat-cushion was so badly frayed that there was one place where a spring might stab through at any instant. But Mr. Binder beamed to himself. He had won an argument with his friend, Mr. McFadden. He had proof of his correctness. It was the paper parcel on his lap.

The cab passed Vernon Street. It went by Dupuy Street. Mr. Binder chuckled to himself. In his reading, the idea of compenetrability had turned up with a logical argument for its possibility that Mr. Binder considered hot stuff. He had repeated that argument to Mr. McFadden, who tended to skepticism. Mr. McFadden had said it was nonsense. Mr. Binder insisted that it was a triumph of inductive reasoning. Mr. McFadden snorted. Mr. Binder said, "All right, I'll prove it!" Now he was on the way to do so.

His reading of abstruse philosophy had brought him happiness. He gloated as he rode behind Mr. Steems. He even untied his parcel to admire the evidence all over again. It was a large, thin, irregularly-shaped piece of soft leather, supposedly a deerskin. It has been a throw-over on the parlor settee, and had had a picture of Hiawatha and Minnehaha on it. The picture was long gone, now, and the whole thing was about right to wash a car with; but Mr. Binder regarded it very happily. It was his proof that compenetrability was possible.

Another cab eeled in before Mr.

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Steems, forcing him to stop or collide. Mr. Steems jammed on his brakes, howling with wrath. The brakes screamed, the wheels locked, and Mr. Binder slid forward off his seat. Mr. Steems hurled invective at the other driver. In turn, he received invective. They achieved heights of eloquence, which soothed their separate ires. Mr. Steems turned proudly to Mr. Binder.

"That told him off, huh?"

Mr. Binder did not answer. He was not there. The back of the cab was empty. It was as if Mr. Binder had evaporated.

Mr. Steems fumed. He turned off abruptly into a side street, stopped his cab, and investigated. Mr. Binder was utterly gone. A large patch of deerskin lay on the floor. On the deerskin there was an unusual collection of small objects. Mr. Steems found:

1 gold watch, monogrammed THB, still running
$.87 in silver, nickel, and copper coins
1 pocket-knife
12 eyelets of metal, suitable for shoes
1 pr. spectacles in metal case
1 nickel-plated ring, which would fit on a tobacco-pipe
147 small bits of metal, looking like zipper-teeth
1 key-ring, with keys
1 metal shoelace tip
1 belt-buckle, minus belt

Mr. Steems swore violently. "Smart guy, huh!" he said wrathfully. "Gettin' a free ride! He outsmarted himself, he did! Let 'im try to get this watch back! I never seen him!"

HE POCKETED the watch and money. The other objects he cast contemptuously away. He was about to heave out the deerhide when he remembered that Miss Susie Blepp had made disparaging remarks about the condition of his cab. So had her mother, while grafting dead-head cab-rides as Mr. Steems' prospective mother-in-law. Mr. Steems said, "The hell with her!" But then, grudgingly, he spread the deerhide over the backseat cushion. It helped. It hid the spring that was about to stab through.

Mr. Steems was dourly pleased. He went and hocked Mr. Binder's watch and felt a great deal better. He resumed his lawful trade of plying the city streets as a common carrier. Presently he made a soft moaning sound.

Susie's mother stod on the curb, waving imperiously. His taxi flag was up. Trust her to spot that first! He couldn't claim he was busy. Bitterly, he pulled in and opened the back door for her. She got in, puffing a little. She was large and formidable, and Mr. Steems marveled gloomily that a cute trick like Susie could have such a battleaxe for a mother.

"Susie told me to tell you," puffed Mrs. Blepp, "that she can't keep tonight's date."

"Oh, no?" said Mr. Steems sourly.

"No," said Susie's mother severely. She waited challengingly for Steems to drive her home; (any hesitation on his part would mean a row with Susie). She slipped off her shoes. She settled back.

Mr. Steems drove. As he drove, he muttered. Susie was breaking a date. Maybe she was going out with someone else. There was a cop named Cassidy who always looked wistfully at Susie, even in the cab of her affianced boyfriend. Mr. Steems muttered anathemas upon all cops.

He drew up before Susie's house Susie wouldn't be home yet. He turned to let Susie's mother out.

His eyes practically popped out of his head.

The back of the cab was empty. On the seat there was $.17 in pennies, one nickel, a slightly greenish wedding-ring, an empty lipstick container, several straight steel springs, twelve bobbie pins, assorted safety pins and a very glittering dress-ornament. On the floor Mrs. Blepp's shoes remained—size ten-and-a-half.

Mr. Steems cried out hoarsely. He stared about him, gulped several times for air, and then drove rapidly away. Something was wrong. He did not know what, but it was instinct to get away

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from there. Mr. Steems did not want trouble. He especially did not want trouble with Susie. But here it was.

This was bad business! Presently he stopped and inspected his cab with infinite care. Nothing. The deerskin made a good-looking seat-cover. That was all. There was no opening anywhere through which Susie's mother could have fallen. She could not have gone out through the door. Under no circumstances would she have abandoned her shoes. Something untoward and upsetting had come into Mr. Steems' life.

Mr. Steems retired to a bar and had several beers. There was a situation to be faced; to be thought out. But Mr. Steems was not an intellectual type. Thinking made his head hurt. He could not ask advice, because nobody would believe what he had to say. Apprehension developed into desperation, and then into defiance.

"I didn't do nothing," muttered Mr. Steems truculently. "I don't know nothing about it!" Would Susie not be willing to believe that? "I never seen her!" said Mr. Steems in firm resolve. "I never set eyes on that old battleaxe today! The hell with her!"

He had another beer. Then he realized that to stay encloistered, drinking beer after beer, might suggest to someone that he was upset. So he set out to act in so conspicuously normal a manner that nobody could suspect him of anything. He had lost considerable time in his meditation, however. It was nearly nine o'clock when he resumed his cruising. It was half-past nine when he stopped behind a jam of other vehicles at a red light on Evers Avenue. He waited. He brooded.

Somebody wrenched open the door of the cab and crawled in.

Mr. Steems reacted normally: "Hey! What's the idea? Howya know I want a fare now?"

Something cold and hard touched his spine and a hoarse voice snarled: "Get goin', buddy. Keep your mouth shut, an' don't turn around!"

THE red light changed. Shoutings broke out half a block behind. Mr. Steems—with cold metal urging him—shifted gears with great celerity. He drove with all the enthusiasm of a man with no desire to be mixed up in gunplay. The shouting died away in the distance. Mr. Steems drove on and drove on. Presently he dared to say meekly:

"Where you want me to drive you or let you out?"

Behind him there was silence.

Resting on the deerskin seat-cover there was a very nasty-looking automatic pistol, a black-jack, $1.25 in coins, seventeen watches, thirty-four rings, a sterling silver gravy-bowl and a garnet necklace. There were also two large gold teeth.

Mr. Steems, trembling, went home and put the cab away. Then, unable to stay alone, he went out and drank more beers as he tried to figure things out. He did not succeed.

After a long time he muttered bitterly, "It ain't my fault! I don't know nothing about it!" Still later he said more bitterly still, "I can't do nothing about it, anyways!" Both statements were true. They gave Mr. Steems some pleasure. He was innocent. He was blameless. Whatever might turn up, he could stridently and truthfully insist upon his complete rectitude. So he had some more beers.

Came the dawn, and Susie babbling frantically on a telephone. Her mother hadn't come home or called, and it was raining terribly and—

Mr. Steems said indignantly: "I ain't seen her. What's the idea of missing that date with me?"

Susie wept. She repeated that her mother had not come home. The police—Patrolman Cassidy—had checked, and she hadn't been in any accident. Susie wanted Mr. Steems to do something to find out what had become of her mother.

"Huh!" said Mr. Steems. "Nobody ain't going to kidnap her! I don't know nothing about it. What you want me to do?"

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Susie, sniffling, wanted him to help find her mother. But Mr. Steems knew better than to try it. It hurt his head even to think about it. Besides, he didn't want to get mixed up in anything.

"Look," he said firmly, "it's rainin' cats and dogs outside. I got to make some money so we can get married, Susie. The old dame'll turn up. Maybe she's just kickin' up her heels. G'bye."

He went out to his cab. Rain fell heavily. It should have brought joy to Mr. Steems' heart, but he regarded his cab uneasily. It wore a look of battered innocence. Mr. Steems grimly climbed into the front seat. He set forth to act innocent. It seemed necessary. That was about nine o'clock in the morning.

BY HALF-PAST ten, cold chills were practically a permanent fixture along his spine. He had had passengers. They had vanished. Unanimously. Inexplicably. They left behind them extraordinary things as mementos. Financially, Mr. Steems was not doing badly. He averaged half a dollar or better in cash from every fare. But otherwise he was doing very badly indeed. At eleven, driving in teeming rain, he saw Patrolman Cassidy —and Cassidy saw him. At Cassidy's gesture Mr. Steems pointed to the back of his cab, implying that he had a fare, and drove on through the rain. His teeth chattered. He drove hastily to his lodgings. Business had been good. Far too good to have allowed Cassidy a look into the cab. Mr. Steems furtively carried into his lodgings:

4 suitcases
1 briefcase
3 prs. woman's shoes (assorted sizes)
1½ doz. red roses
1 plucked chicken, ready for the oven
2 qts. milk
1 imitation-leather-covered wallpaper catalog

From his pockets he dumped into a bureau drawer not less than eight watches—men's and women's—four rings, eleven bracelets and nine scatterpins. He had brushed out of the cab at least a double handful of small nails, practically all of them bent at the end and many of them rusted.

Mr. Steems was in a deplorable mental state. Once he had stashed his loot, however, indignation took the place of uneasiness.

"What's that guy Cassidy want to see me for, huh?" he demanded of the air. "What's he tryin' to do? Figure I done somethin' to that old bag?"

He drove back indignantly in search of Cassidy. He scowled at the raincoated cop when he found him. Cassidy explained that Susie was upset. Did Mr. Steems, by any chance—

"I told her I didn't know nothing about the old dame!" said Mr. Steems stridently. "Sure, she grafts a ride every time she gets a chance! But I didn't see her yesterday. What's Susie think I done to her, anyway?"

Patrolman Cassidy did not know. Naturally.

And then a passenger with two-suit cases and a briefcase stepped up beside Cassidy and said, "Is this taxi taken?"

There was nothing for Mr. Steems to do but accept him as a fare. To refuse would have been suspicious.

Two blocks away the cab somehow felt empty—Mr. Steems was acquiring an uncanny ability to feel this—and he turned around and saw a cigarette-case and a monogrammed lighter on the back-seat cushion, with $1.25 in change, pants-buttons, metal eyelets suitable for shoes, a gold-barreled ball-point pen, and other miscellany.

Mr. Steems could not afford to cease to drive his taxicab. To do so would be to invite inquiry. He could not refuse passengers. To do so would be instantly suspicious. He was caught in a vise of circumstance. But he had the sustaining conviction of blamelessness. What happened was not his fault. And anyhow he was one of those fortunate people who develops fury as a fine art. It was his custom always to get mad enough soon enough to avoid all need for thought. He went through life in an aura of pleasurable indignation, always assured that any-

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thing that happened was somebody else's fault.

That process took over now. When a passenger flagged him down and got in his cab and gave an address, Mr. Steems was blameless. When the passenger vanished into thin air, leaving souvenirs behind, Mr. Steems merely felt his resentment increase. By the end of the second day he seethed as he cleaned up after each departed fare. He raged as he packed his lodgings with the baggage and parcels that mysteriously remained.

Somebody, he muttered darkly to himself, was gonna have to pay for this funny business! Somebody was gonna pay plenty! When they tried to get their stuff back they'd see!

That prospect of future justification and revenge ended his mental efforts. He did call up Susie to find out if her mother had turned up yet—she hadn't and he generously offered to take Susie out on a date to take her mind off her troubles. But Susie got almost hysterical, and Mr. Steems took refuge in a beer and embittered mutterings. He wasn't responsible for what happened to people who rode with him!

"What's a guy gonna do?" he asked bitterly of his beer-glass. There was the possibility that he could cease to drive the cab from which every passenger seemed to vanish into thin air. But he dismissed that notion with incredulous horror. "They want a guy to starve to death?" he demanded truculently.

He would definitely not consider starving to death. But he couldn't fathom the mystery. He'd completely forgotten the clue that might have given him the answer. Mr. Thaddeus Binder had been the first passenger to vanish. He had left the deerskin behind, loaded with his possessions. The deerskin remained, and now frequently was loaded with other people's possessions. But Mr. Steems could not add that together. And even if he had, Mr. Steems would have failed to understand. He would have needed to be told that Mr. Binder had made an experiment to prove that compenetrability was possible. Maybe even that wouldn't have helped, however; and, besides, he didn't remember Mr. Binder. He recalled male passengers by their tips and some female ones by their hips. Mr. Binder was gone from his recollection.

A THIRD day passed. Susie's mother did not reappear. Susie took an unreasoning dislike to Mr. Steems. She said he didn't care. As a matter of fact, nobody cared more than he did, but he was in a fix. Susie conferred tearfully with Patrolman Cassidy. Her mother's disappearance was duly reported to the Bureau of Missing Persons. There were a surprising lot of people missing, all of a sudden. Patrolman Cassidy discovered the fact and grew ambitious. He considered that in Susie's mother's case he had a lead. He began to work from that standpoint.

After the fourth day of the phenomenon of the disappearing passengers, Mr. Steems' lodgings began to get crowded—with suitcases, packages, storage batteries, saxophones in their cases, groceries of all kinds. One wall of his room was solidly banked with suitcases alone. After the fifth day, the space beneath his bed was filled and a second wall partly obscured. On the sixth day he began really to run out of space.

That day—the sixth—was the day the newspapers broke the story. The headlines were impressive.

52 Missing in City! Monster at Work?

And there it was. Up to a given hour, fifty-two citizens of all ages and both sexes had disappeared from the city's streets, and other disappearances were being reported almost hourly: a list of unfortunates who had seemingly gone out of existence liked snuffed candle-flames . . . .

Mr. Steems read the list with a jaundiced eye. "I never seen none of 'em," he said bitterly, to the missing persons' luggage piled against the walls about him. "I don't ask nobody their name an' ad-

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dress when they get in my cab! It ain't none of my business!" Then Mr. Steems again hurled the crushing, unanswerable question at an imaginary interrogator: "Whadda you want a guy to do? Stop runnin' his taxi an' starve to death?"

The newspaper account pointed out that none of the known missing had any reason to disappear. Some had vanished as early as eleven in the morning, and some as late as half-past twelve at night. All had dropped out of sight while on their way from one part of the city to another. Several had last been seen entering a taxicab. Anxious relatives were demanding that the police take drastic action. They demanded the questioning of taxidrivers—

"Yeah!" cried Mr. Steems furiously. "Not only that old bag hadda vanish, so Susie don't speak to me no more, but now they' gonna get everybody scared to ride in taxicabs!" He slammed down the paper and went to the corner saloon. He had a beer. He believed that he thought better with a beer. It was a delusion. He brooded. "Whadda they want?" he muttered oratorically, a little later. "It's them Commies start stories like that! Them newspaper guys, they' Commies!"

He had another beer, and his rage mounted to the point where he dropped a nickel in the saloon pay-phone and furiously called a newspaper.

"Whadda you guys tryin' to do?" he demanded shrilly. "You wanna drive a honest, self-respectin' guy outa business? You go printin' stuff about people vanishin' outa taxicabs and how am I gonna make a livin'? You wanna drive a guy to crime?"

He hung up and went to his cab, muttering embitteredly. Three blocks away he picked up a fat man for a fare. The fat man had an evening paper in his hand. He gave an address. He said in mock fear: "You're not the Taxi Monster, are you?"

Mr. Steems let in the clutch with a violent jerk. He drove a full hundred yards, hissing like superheated steam awaiting release. Then he spoke in a tone of suppressed frenzy. He expressed his opinion of newspaper reporters in terms that would have curdled sulphuric acid. He worked up to scathing comment on people who made jokes at guys who were only trying to earn an honest living. His voice rose. His bitterness increased. When—it was then nine-forty-five P.M.—when he came to a red light and a large truck forced him to halt, he was expressing himself at the top of his lungs. There were stores on either side of the street. Their signs lighted his face clearly.

A squad-car came to a halt beside him. Patrolman Cassidy said, "That's him!" and got out and walked to the side of the cab. Mr. Steems was saying shrilly:

"It's guys like you—guys that because you got some money think you can raise hell with any guy that's got to make a living—its guys like you that ruin this country! Yah, you capitalists—"

"Say," said Cassidy, in Mr. Steem's ear. "What's the matter?"

Mr. Steems jumped. Cassidy! Outrage upon outrage! He said furiously: "That guy in the back asked me if I'd killed anybody in my cab yet, on accounta that fancy piece in the paper—"

Patrolman Cassidy looked. Then he said:

"That guy in the back? What guy in the back?"

Mr. Steems turned. There was no guy in the back at all. But on the deerskin seat-cover was a watch, and a monogrammed fountain pen in silver and gold, and $.75 in small silver, a hearing aid, three pants-buttons, a glittering pile of zipper-teeth, and a belt-buckle.

Patrolman Cassidy signaled to the squad-car. He stepped into the cab himself.

"We're going to Headquarters," he said in deadly calm. "I've been checking, and Susie's mother ain't the only one that was last seen getting into your cab, Mr. Steems! We're goin' to Headquarters, and don't you try nothing funny on

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the way, you hear?"

Mr. Steems practically strangled upon his sense of injustice. He started toward Headquarters. The squad-car followed close.

When at last he could speak, Mr. Steems cried shrilly:

"You ain't got nothing on me!"

And there was no answer from the back of the cab.

MR. STEEMS can tell of these things. He can tell of his status after his lodgings had been searched, and—stacked against the wall, hidden under the bed, jammed into the closet—souvenirs turned up of seventy-one out of the seventy-two persons finally missing. The exception was, of course, Patrolman Cassidy, whose shield, service gun, whistle, handcuffs, brass knuckles and other assorted metallic mementos lay enshrined at Headquarters as a symbol of devotion to duty.

Mr. Steems became instantly, nationally famous as the Taxi Monster, murderer by wholesale. His downfall was ascribed to an untiring patrolman who, spurred on by love of a missing person's daughter, had gone sleepless and followed clue after clue until finally he unmasked the monster—and had tragically become his final victim, done somehow to death on the way to Police Headquarters while a squad-car followed close behind.

Mr. Steems was held without bail on seventy-one charges of murder in the first degree. (It would have been seventy-two, had Mr. Binder's vanishing been reported.) Mr. Steems' frenziedly righteous protests went unheeded. He was sunk.

But there is justice for all in these United States, especially if publicity goes along with it. A Mr. Irving Castleman was appointed by the court to defend Mr. Steems. He instantly pointed out that not one dead body had so far been found, nor had any of the missing persons been seen dead by anybody. The principle of *corpus delicti* therefore applied. He requested Mr. Steems' instant release. The authorities countered with charges of grand larceny for each article found piled up in Mr. Steems' lodgings. His lawyer submitted that no complaint of theft had been made by any missing person. Those objects might have been gifts to Mr. Steems. There was no proof to the contrary. Mr. Steems should be released. It was not until the cops encouraged a lynching-mob to hang around outside the jail that Mr. Steems' lawyer consented to let him stay in a cell as a suspicious person.

Things boomed. Feature writers, news commentators and gossip columnists made the most of Mr. Steems. He was compared to Mr. Landru, to Mr. Cripps, to Bluebeard, Giles de Rais and other mass murderes. His record topped them all. He was tendered the rewards of such eminence. Huge payments were offered for the story of his life and crimes, and his lawyer hopefully urged him to accept so he could pay his trial expenses. Three psychoanalysts explained his urge to kill as the result of childhood frustration. One psychoanalyst said it had developed because he was not frustrated as a child. Four sociologists declared that not Mr. Steems but society would be on trial when he stood before the bar. The Bell Telephone Company set aside its biggest switchboard for the use of the press when the trial took place.

Susie hit the headlines. Not as Mr. Steems' fiancee, however, but as the heartbroken sweetheart of his final victim. Three other women, however, claimed to be already married to him, and twenty-nine more wrote and suggested matrimony.

And then the bottom dropped out of everything.

Patrolman Cassidy, who had vanished from Mr. Steems' cab on the way to Headquarters, came limping into that building in a state of bemused distress. He said he had fallen out of Mr. Steems' cab and found himself minus shield, gun, handcuffs, pants-buttons, and the nails

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in his shoes, which came apart as he picked himself up. He'd come at once to Headquarters to report. . . .

An hour later a fat man was found lying on the street, out of breath. He insisted that he had kidded a taxicab chauffeur about being The Monster, and the next thing he knew he'd been thrown out on the street. Minus his watch, belt-buckle, hearing-aid, pants-zippers, shoe-nails, and other possessions.

IN QUICK succession other missing persons reappeared on the public streets. All were more or less disheveled. Each had lost all metal carried on his or her person. Each was convinced that he—or she—had not disappeared at all, but had merely gotten into a cab, instantly been thrown out, and immediately had come to report the offense. In four hours nine missing persons reappeared—persons who had been missing for four to five days. In six hours fifteen others appeared—having been missing from six days to seven. In twenty-four hours, fifty-eight out of the seventy-one known vanished persons had reappeared and unanimously identified Mr. Steems as associated with their mishap. And the end was not yet.

With keen intelligence, the police observed that those who returned were doing so in the reverse order from that in which they had disappeared. When, therefore, Susie's mother appeared in outraged fury to report the theft of her shoes, wedding-ring and the steel springs out of her foundation garment by the villianous Mr. Steems—whom Susie would never speak to again—the police knew the end was near.

It was nearer than that. It had come. Mr. Binder found himself lying flat on his back on the public highway. He had, he thought at first, fallen out of a taxicab. Then he realized that he had merely fallen into the soft, ancient deerskin over which he had been gloating a moment before at 5:07 in the afternoon of May 3rd. Now there was neither taxicab nor deerskin about. Moreover, it had suddenly become the middle of the night, and his watch and small change was gone, and his pants were falling down . . .

Mr. Binder went home—a matter of two blocks. There were papers piled in his front hall. He discovered that it was May 14th. He learned what had been going on. He'd gone out of his house, tumbled into the deerskin which proved compenetrability a practical matter—and now it was eleven days and some hours later.

Mr. Binder brewed a cup of strong tea and thought concentratedly. With the facts before him and his background of technical knowledge, it was not difficult to work out a theory which completely explained all the observed and reported facts. But this had more than merely intellectual interest. There was a legal aspect. Seventy-one people could sue . . . Mr. Binder shuddered. Then he discovered that his name had not been listed as among the missing. Nobody had reported him gone, because he lived alone. No souvenir of him had been found in Mr. Steems' lodging, because Mr. Steems had hocked his watch.

Mr. Binder came to a very intelligent conclusion. The thing for him to do was keep his mouth shut.

Next day, however, he went over to see his friend Mr. McFadden.

"Now, what d'you know!" said Mr. McFadden. "I had it you were a victim of that there Taxi Monster. Where were you, anyway?"

"I'd like to be sure," said Mr. Binder. "Listen, George!"

HE TOLD Mr. McFadden exactly what had happened. He had found, said Mr. Binder, the secret of compenetration. The atoms of solid things, even steel, are very small and relatively far apart, so that the solidest of objects has actually as much empty space in it as a dust-cloud; neutrons and cosmic rays go through without trouble. Ordinarily two solid objects can no more penetrate each other than two dust-clouds can penetrate

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each other. The dust-clouds are held together by the air on which the dust-particles float. Solid objects are held together by the electric and magnetic fields the individual atoms possess. But *if* the electric fields of atoms can be stopped from hindering, there is plenty of room for one seemingly solid object to penetrate another, and therefore for two or more things to be in the same place at the same time.

"And that," said Mr. Binder, "is what I did. I couldn't take away all the hindering of the atoms, George. I could just cut it down. But I fixed up a deerskin that used to be a throw on the parlor settee, and I could push anything but metal right through it without making a hole. Metal wouldn't go through. It stayed behind. I had the deer-skin sort of magnetized, George, and the effect wouldn't last forever, but I started over here with it to show you that I could make things compenetrate."

"Does that tell me where you've been—if I believe it?"

"Well," said Mr. Binder, considering. "I don't know that it does. You see, George, I missed out on one thing. Normally those atom-fields hold each atom in its place up-and-down, and side-to-side, and fore-and-aft—if you get what I mean. When something—an atom—tries to push between them, they push right back. But when I hindered them from that, they still pushed. Only they pushed at right angles to up-and-down and side-to-side and fore-and-aft. At right angles to all of the other directions they ought to push in."

"At right angles to all other directions?" said Mr. McFadden skeptically. "How could that be? T'would be a fourth dimension!"

"It was," said Mr. Binder modestly. "And the fourth dimnesion's time-flow, George. So when I fell through the deerskin, and all those atoms pushed on the atoms that are me, they pushed me off in the fourth dimension. They pushed me into the middle of week after next. This is the middle of week after next to me, George. By relativity."

MR. McFADDEN stared. Then, carefully, he filled his pipe. He lighted it and puffed without words. Mr. McFadden was a skeptical man.

Mr. Binder said meditatively: "Ah, well! Those atoms that get their fields all tricked up won't stay that way. Every day they threw people who fell through the deerskin just a little shorter distance. From the middle of the week after next, where they threw me, they've slowed down and slowed down. By what the papers say, I figure the last missing people only got thrown into the day after tomorrow. And maybe by this time the atoms in the deerskin are back to normal and won't allow any compenetration."

"Is that so?" said Mr. McFadden, with fine scorn.

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Binder regretfully. "Compenetration can be done, George, but it just isn't practical. I'm going to try replication."

"And what, may I ask, is replication."

"Ah!" said Mr. Binder, enthusiastically. "That's the philosophical notion that it could be possible for the same thing to be in several places at the same time! That has possibilities, George!"

It can be reported that Mr. Thaddeus Binder is now at work on the problem of replication which—he will explain—is a philosophico-scientific prospect of great interest. He is a very nice, pink-cheeked little man, Mr. Binder, but maybe somebody ought to stop him. He does not realize his talents. Replication, now. . . .

Mr. Steems could be applied to for an opinion. After all, he has had experience of Mr. Binder's experiments. If the matter of the Taxi Monster and the middle of the week after next is mentioned in his vicinity, he will begin to speak, rapidly and with emotion. His speech will grow impassioned, his tone will grow hoarse and shrill at the same time, and presently he will foam at the mouth. But on the other hand, Susie Blepp and Patrolman Cassidy feel quite otherwise.

It's pretty hard to decide.

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HALLUCINATION

By CHARLES E. FRITCH

The three eyes watched wherever he went. . . .

JOHN TAYLOR was certain he was going mad.

At breakfast, he ignored his eggs, bacon, and toast, and stared uncertainly into his coffee. From the other side of the table came the rattle of newspaper and his wife's voice.

"They're sending that rocket up to Mars next week," she said. "The way the government can spend our money is amazing."

"They have special committees," John Taylor forced himself to joke, "who stay awake nights thinking of ways."

Bravely, he clutched his cup in a firm grip, lifted it to his lips, and stared over it at his wife. Her eyes met his. Three of them.

The cup fell from his trembling fingers, clattering onto the saucer, spilling coffee. He leaped up, alarmed.

"I—I'm sorry. Clumsy." He tried vainly to undo the damage with a napkin.

"I'll take care of it," his wife said. Her eyes were full of concern; there were only two of them now. "Aren't you feeling well, John?"

John Taylor shook his head. "Been having headaches," he said. "Nervous." He didn't tell her he'd been seeing a psychiatrist.

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"Maybe you'd better stay home," she suggested.

He smiled wanly. "No, I'll be all right. It's nothing."

Okay, so he was going off his rocker. So what? Lots of people do. But why in the devil did he have to do it so conspicuously? Why not simply crawl unobserved into some dark corner and quietly blow a fuse or two? Why did he have to suddenly start imagining that people were turning into three-eyed monsters who had four tentacles in place of the conventional two arms? It was crazy.

Correction: *he* was crazy.

HE KISSED his wife goodbye, and with a feeling of horror felt four arms around him. He turned away without looking at her, and concentrated on the sand crunching softly beneath his feet. Sand? As he looked, it blurred, becoming hard concrete. He felt a mad impulse to run, but he managed to control the urge.

The air felt cold and thin, and the sun seemed too far away, a small orange disc in a dark sky. Overhead, triangular aircraft flitted, taking owners to work. He shook his head, and the air grew warmer, thicker, and the sun resumed its normal size. The aircraft became sparrows going nowhere.

Last time the psychiatrist had given him an injection of an unpronouncable something which had cleared his mind. But now it must be wearing off.

"We may have to try shock," the psychiatrist had suggested.

"That's okay," he told the man. "Anything. Anything."

He walked slowly down the street. Work was out of the question. How could he work with people whose features continually shifted; who had three eyes, then two, then three; whose bodies changed from human to nonhuman?

Even walking down the street was something of an effort. People hurried about him, unnoticing, their eyes straight ahead. But it was the third eye; the third eye that turned to follow him as he passed. The way they looked you'd think he was the one who was odd.

They were probably right, but the knowledge did not diminish the hallucinations. Even the buildings around him swayed uncertainly. They were the high, many-windowed structures he had known all his life; and then, suddenly, the image shifted, and they were low, squatting things, hugging sand.

Sand? He blinked. Sand?

He boarded the subway and saw women hanging on straps with one of four tentacles, men with three eyes perusing newspapers. He closed his eyes, listening with infinite care to the awkward clatter of wheels on rail. When he opened his eyes again, both women and men had returned to the style of arms and eyes in conventional numbers.

IT MAY not work, you know," the psychiatrist warned. His three eyes glittered.

"That's okay. I—I've got to try. I'll try anything!"

An assistant strapped him to the table.

John Taylor wet his lips. "Will—will it hurt?"

"Not a bit," they assured him.

Eight tentacles strapped him down. They made him comfortable with something soft and pillowy under his head and uncomfortable with something soft and cottony to keep his teeth apart.

"Relax," the psychiatrist said, "it'll be over in seconds."

A tentacle reached for a switch. Beside him, the assistant watched with three dispassionate eyes.

John Taylor felt sudden panic. They're trying to kill me, he thought wildly. I've discovered their secret, and they're going to electrocute me!

The thought was followed by a brief calmness as stray fragments of thought combined. Their secret? Of course. They *were* monsters. People from—from Mars, probably, who had kept up an illusion for Earthmen like himself. Be-

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cause of some freak accident a wire had become crossed in his mind, and the illusion was becoming weaker, breaking down. He had discovered their secret, and they couldn't afford to let him live.

The tentacle gripped the switch. John Taylor tried to scream, but the cloth in his mouth gagged him. Tension mounted; he struggled vainly to escape. The switch fell, and a searing force blotted his consciousness.

AFTER Taylor had left, the psychiatrist wrote down his name, a few words of description, and then closed the notebook with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Closing the case?" said his assistant.

The psychiatrist nodded, his three eyes glittering. "May as well. That seemed to do the trick."

"Strange case," mused the assistant.

"Yes," the psychiatrist agreed. He leaned back and rested one of four tentacles on the chair arm. "In fact, first case I've heard of with that particular hallucination."

"Do you suppose the space rocket had anything to do with it?"

The psychiatrist gazed through the window at the low, squat buildings hugging red sand.

He recalled wonderingly the patient's description of them as being at times tall and thin; weird architecture even for hallucinations!

"I suspect the space rocket had a lot to do with it," he said. "In fact, I'm surprised there're not more cases like that."

"That description of his wife got me," the assistant said.

"Weird, wasn't it?"

"Like somebody from another planet." His voice turned unbelieving and a little distasteful. "For awhile he even thought *we* looked like that!"

"A soft, pink creature," the psychiatrist recalled, "with *two* eyes, *two* tentacles."

The assistant shuddered. "*Two!* Grotesque."

"One good thing about the space rocket, though," the psychiatrist said. "When it comes back, at least we'll find out what the people of Earth are *really* like."

Two Terran Slickers Meet the Bird-Folk of Mars . . . and Get Plucked . . . in a Sparkling Satire!

THE BIRD OF TIME

An Interplanetary Novel

By WALLACE WEST

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FEATURED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!

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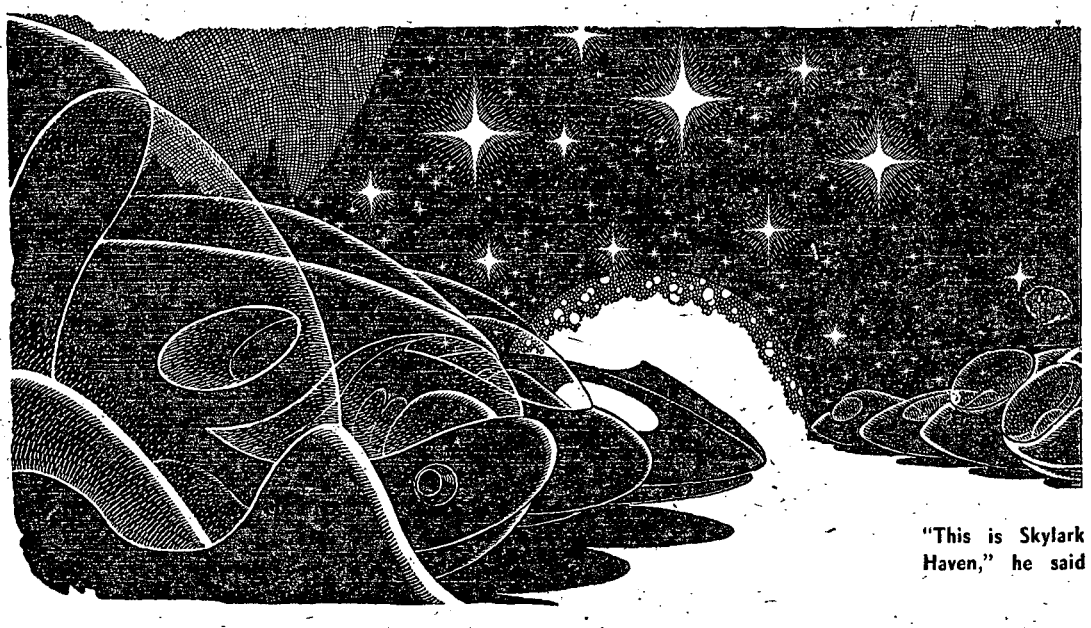
Cholwell's Chickens

A Sequel to ABERCROMBIE STATION

By JACK VANCE



"This is Skylark Haven," he said

I

MR. MYCROFT ran a hand through his gray hair and said in a wry voice, "I make no pretense of understanding you."

In the big leather chair reserved for the relaxation of Mycroft's high-strung clients Jean fidgeted, stretched her fingers, examined the backs of her hands. "I don't even understand myself."

Through the window she watched a tomato-red Marshall Moonchaser fleeting along the blue April sky. "Money hasn't affected me quite the way I expected. . . I've always wanted a little boat like that. I could buy a dozen if I liked, but—" she shook her head, eyes still out in the blue distance.

Mycroft recalled the first time he had seen her: wary and wild, characterized by a precocious feral quality, a recklessness that made ordinary women seem pastel and insipid. Mycroft smiled grimly. He could hardly say that she had become dull. She still had her elan, her

She Wasn't Long on Family or Share-the-Wealth

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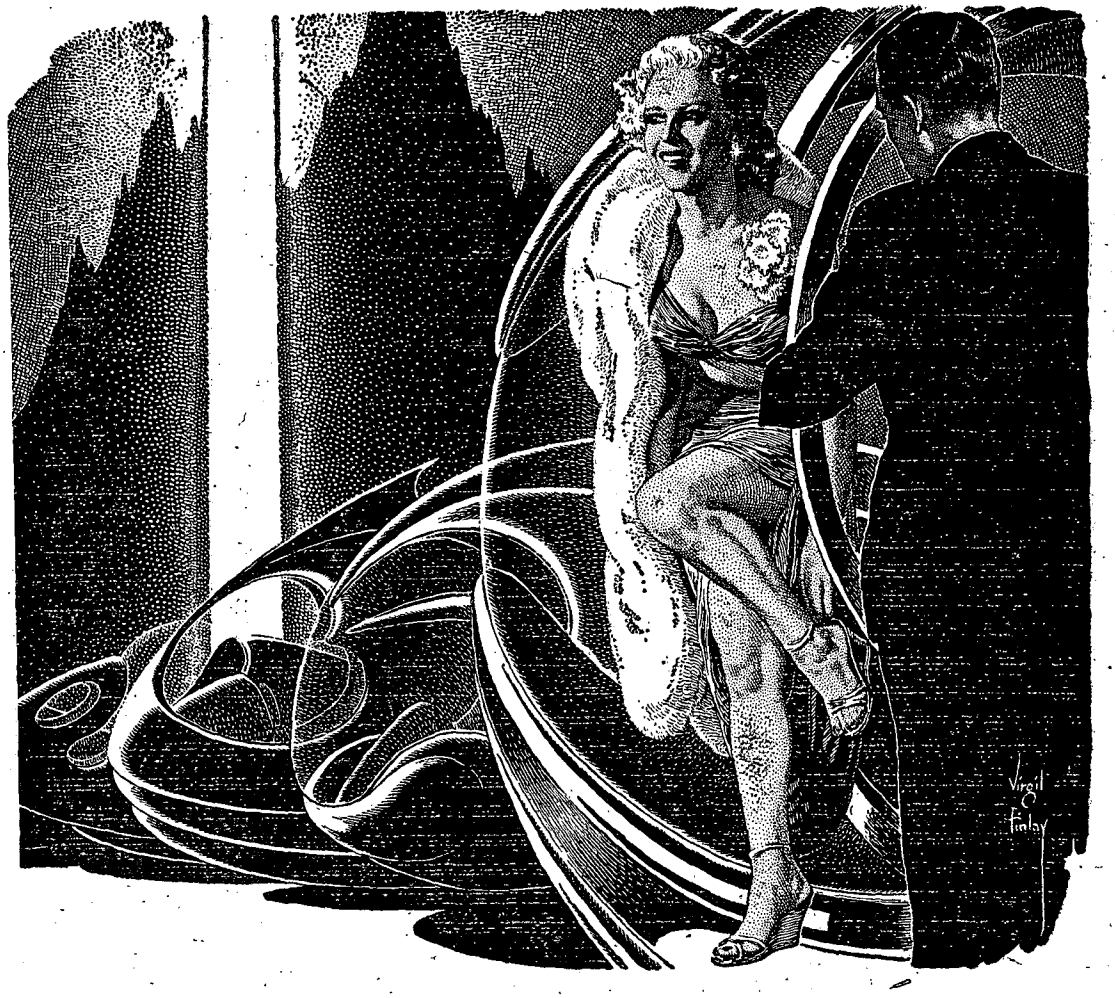

fey charm. She was jet and ivory and pale rose; her mouth was wide and flexible, her little teeth were white and sharp; she carried herself with a swashbuckling fervor—but something was gone, and not necessarily for the worse.

"Nothing's like what I thought it would be," said Jean. "Clothes. . . ." She looked down at her dark green slacks, her black pullover sweater. "These are good enough. Men. . ." Mycroft watched her attentively. "They're all the same, silly jackasses."

Mycroft made a small involuntary grimace, settled himself in his chair. At fifty he was three times her age.

"The lovers are bad," said Jean, "but I'm used to them, I've never lacked there. But the other ones, the financiers, the sharp-shooters—they upset me. Like spiders."

Mycroft made haste to explain. "It's inevitable. They're after anyone with wealth. Cranks—promoters—confidence

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men—they won't leave you alone. Refer them to me. As your guardian I can dispose of them quickly."

"When I was poor," said Jean mournfully, "I wanted so many things. And now—" she swung out her arms in a gesture of abandon "—I can buy and buy and buy. And I don't want anything. I can have anything I want, and it's almost as if I had it already. . . I'd rather like to make some more money. . . I guess what I've got is like the first taste of blood to a wolf."

Mycroft sat back in alarm. "My dear girl, that's the occupational disease of old men! Not for a—"

Jean said fretfully, "You act, Mr. Mycroft, as if I'm not human." This was true; Mycroft instinctively behaved toward Jean as he might toward a beautiful, alarming and unpredictable animal.

"It's not that I especially want more money. . . I suppose the fact is that I'm bored."

Worse and worse, thought Mycroft. Bored people got into mischief. Desperately he searched his mind. "Ah—there's always the theater. You could finance a production and perhaps you'd like to act in it yourself?"

"Pish," said Jean. "Bunch of fakers!"

"You might go to school?"

"It sounds very tiring, Mr. Mycroft."

"I suppose it would be. . ."

"I'm not the scholastic type. And there's something else on my mind. It's probably foolish and pointless, but I can't seem to get away from it. I'd like to know about my father and mother. . . I've always felt bitter toward them—but suppose I had been kidnaped or stolen? If that were the case, they'd be glad to see me."

Mycroft privately considered such a possibility unlikely. "Well, that's perfectly normal and natural. We'll put an investigator on the trail. As I recall, you were abandoned in a saloon on one of the outer worlds."

JEAN'S eyes had become hard and bright. "At Joe Parlier's Aztec Tavern, Angel City on Codiron."

"Codiron," said Mycroft. "Yes, I know that district very well. As I recall, it's not a large world nor very populous."

"If it's like it was when I left—which was seven years ago—it's backward and old-fashioned. But never mind the investigator. I'd like to look around myself."

Mycroft opened his mouth to cluck disapproval when the door slid back and Ruth, Mycroft's receptionist, looked in.

"Dr. Cholwell to see you." She glanced sharply sidewise at Jean.

"Cholwell?" grunted Mycroft. "I wonder what he wants."

"He said that you arranged to have lunch with him."

"Yes, that's right. Show him in."

With a final hard glance at Jean, Ruth left the room.

Jean said, "Ruth doesn't like me."

Mycroft moved in his chair, embarrassed. "Don't mind her. She's been with me close to twenty years. . . I suppose the sight of a pretty girl in my office disturbs her sense of fitness. Especially—" his ears colored "—one that I take such an interest in."

Jean smiled faintly. "Someday I'll let her find me sitting in your lap."

"No," said Mycroft, arranging the papers on his desk. "I don't think you'd better."

Cholwell came briskly into the room—a man Mycroft's age, lean, bright-eyed, elegant in a jerky bird-like manner. He had a sharp chin, a handsome ruff of silver-gray hair, a long sensitive nose. He was precisely dressed, and on his finger Jean glimpsed the golden orb insignia of the Space-Dwellers Association.

Jean looked away, aware that she did not like Cholwell.

Cholwell stared at Jean, patently amazed. His mouth fell open. He took a short step forward. "What are you doing here?" he asked harshly.

Jean looked at him with wonder. "I'm just talking to Mr. Mycroft. . . Does it matter?"

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Cholwell closed his eyes, shook his head as if he were about to faint.

III

CHOLWELL sank into a chair. "Excuse me," he muttered. "I need a pill. . . It's my little trouble—souvenir of a chlorosis bout in the Mendassir sloebanks." He stole another look at Jean, then pulled his eyes away. His lips moved as if he were silently reciting verse.

Mycroft said tartly, "My ward, Miss Parlier. Dr. Cholwell."

Cholwell regained his composure. "I'm charmed to make your acquaintance." He turned to Mycroft. "You never mentioned such a lovely young obligation."

"Jean's a recent addition. The court appointed me to take care of her money." He said to Jean, "Cholwell hails from your corner of space, at least the last I knew." He turned back to Cholwell. "You're still out at the Rehabilitation Home?"

Cholwell tore his eyes away from Jean. "Not precisely. Yes and no. I live on the old premises, but the Home has been abandoned—oh, a long time."

"Why in heaven's name do you hang on then? As I recall, it's a God-forsaken bleak hole."

Cholwell complacently shook his head. "I don't find it so. The scenery is grand, monumental. And then—well, I have a little venture which keeps me busy."

"Venture?"

Cholwell looked out the window. "I'm, ah, raising chickens. Yes." He nodded. "Chickens." His gaze alternated between Jean and Mycroft. "Indeed, I can offer you opportunity for an excellent investment."

Mycroft grunted. Cholwell continued easily:

"No doubt you've heard tales of a hundred percent profit and thought them pretty wild. Well, naturally I can't go quite that far. To be utterly frank, I'm not sure just what will eventuate. Perhaps nothing. My operation is still experimental; I'm short of capital, you see."

Mycroft stuffed his pipe with tobacco. "You've come to the wrong place, Cholwell." He struck a match, puffed. "But—out of curiosity—just what is your operation?"

Cholwell wet his lips, gazed an instant at the ceiling. Well, it's modest enough. I've evolved a strain of chickens which prospers remarkably. I want to erect a modern plant. With the proper backing I can deliver chickens around all the Orion Circuit at a price no domestic supplier can meet."

Jean said doubtfully, "I should think that Codiron would be too cold and windy for chickens."

Parlaying Parlier

READER response to ABERCROMBIE STATION was joyful to an extreme, except for a minority which it seemed to baffle. Even these, however, in many cases, professed to like Jean Parlier for the tough, self-sufficient little female she was—a true representative of the deadlier sex. Leaving her, as the first story did, with a million dollars and time on her hands was just looking for trouble—there had to be a sequel to that situation and here it is.

It is our sneaking suspicion that Vance has outdone himself and that this story of eight Jean Parliers is even better than ABERCROMBIE STATION, but we have no intention of saying so and displaying bias. Try it.

—The Editor

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Cholwell shook his head. "I'm in a warm spot under the Balmoral Mountains. One of the old Trotter sites."

"Oh."

"What I'm leading up to is this. I want to take you out on an inspection tour of the premises and you can see for yourself. There'll be no obligation, none whatever."

Mycroft leaned back, looked Cholwell coolly up and down. "Isn't this rather an impulsive offer?"

Jean said, "I've been thinking of going out to Angel City for a visit—"

Mycroft rattled papers on his desk. "It sounds good, Cholwell. I hope you make out. But I've tied Jean's funds up in conservative stuff. She finds her income completely adequate. As far as I'm concerned personally, I'm lucky to pay the rent. So—"

"Of course, of course," said Cholwell. "I'm too hasty, too enthusiastic. It runs away with me at times." He rubbed his chin with his fingers. "You're acquainted with Codiron, Miss Parlier?"

"I was born in Angel City."

DOCTOR CHOLWELL nodded. "Not far from my own holdings. . . When do you plan to make your visit? Perhaps I could. . ." His voice faded politely, as if he were proffering anything Jean could lay her mind to.

"I'm not sure when I'll be going out. . . In the near future."

Cholwell nodded. "Well, I'll hope to see you again, and perhaps show you around and explain the scope of my work, and then—"

Jean shook her head. "I'm not really interested in chickens—except in the eating line. And anyway Mr. Mycroft has been put in charge of my money. I'm a minor, I'm not supposed to be responsible. So charm Mr. Mycroft, don't waste it on me."

Cholwell took no offense. He nodded gravely. "Well, it's definitely a speculation, and I know Mycroft has to be careful." He looked at his watch. "What about lunch, Mycroft?"

"I'll meet you downstairs in ten minutes."

Cholwell rose to his feet. "Good." He bowed to Jean. "It's been a pleasure meeting you."

After he had departed, Mycroft sank back into his chair, puffed reflectively at his pipe. "Rather an odd chap, old Cholwell. There's a good brain under that fancy exterior, although you wouldn't expect it. . . It sounds as if he might have a good proposition with his chickens."

"Codiron's awfully windy and cold," said Jean doubtfully. "A planet like Emeraud or Beau Aire would be better." She considered the far worlds, and all the strange sights, colors, sounds, the mysterious ruins, the bizarre peoples, came rushing into her mind.

In sudden excitement she jumped to her feet.

"Mr. Mycroft, I'm going to leave on the next packet."

"That's tonight."

Jean's face fell. "The next after, then."

Mycroft expressionlessly knocked the charge out of his pipe. "I know better than to interfere."

Jean patted his shoulder. "You're really a nice man, Mr. Mycroft. I wish I were as nice as you are."

Looking into the glowing face, Mycroft knew that there would be no more work for him this day.

"Now I've got to run," said Jean. "I'll go right down and book passage." She stretched. "Oh heavens, Mr. Mycraft, I feel better already!"

She left the office, gay and swift as the red Moon-chaser which she had watched across the sky.

Mycroft silently put away his papers, rose to his feet, bent over the communicator.

"Ruth, if there's anything urgent I'll be at the club this afternoon, probably in the steam room."

Ruth nodded indignantly to herself. "Little minx! Why won't she stay away, keep to herself? Poor old Mycroft. . . ."

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III

A COMMUNITY fading from life is a dismal place. The streets become barren of people; the air swims clear overhead with lifeless serenity; the general aspect is between gray and dirty brown. Buildings fall into disrepair: piers crumble, trusses sag, windows gape with holes like black starfish.

The poor sections are abandoned first. The streets become pocked and pitted and littered with bits of yellow paper. The more prosperous districts coast on the momentum of the past, but only a few very old and a few very young people are left, the old with their memories, the young with their wistful daydreams. In attics and storerooms, old gear falls apart, releasing odors of varnish and wood, musty cloth and dry paper.

All during Jean's childhood, Angel City had been succumbing to moribundity and decay. Nearby three old volcanic necks, El Primo, El Panatela, El Tiempo, loomed clumsily on the silver Codiron sky. At one time the rotting shale at their bases had glittered with long hexagonal crystals. These possessed the singular property of converting sound into quick colored flashes of light. In the early times miners went forth at night to fire off guns, and stand watching the swift sparkle responding in a wave down the distance.

With the mines prosperity came to Angel City. Fortunes were founded, ripened, spent. Houses were built, a space-port established with adequate warehouses, and Angel City became a typical black-planet settlement—like thousands of others in many respects, but still one to itself, with the unique flavor that made it Angel City. The sun, Mintaka Sub-30 was a tiny disk of dazzling blue-white, the sky showed the color of black pearl. Earth vegetation refused the Codiron soil, and instead of geraniums, zinnia, pansies, petunias, growing around the white houses, there were mogadors, pilgrim vine with fluttering bumble-bee fruits, yeasty banks with great masses of bear-fungus.

Then one by one, like a clan of old men dying, the mines gave out and closed—quietly, apologetically, and Angel City started on its route to dissolution. The miners left town, the easy-money emporiums closed their doors, paint began peeling from the back-street houses.

But now a wild variable entered the picture: Lake Arkansas.

It spread from Angel City out to the horizon, rusty-green and smooth as a table-top, crusted with two feet of algae, brittle and tough enough to support considerable weight. Idle men looked across the flatness and thought of wheat: North Africa, the Great Plains, the Ukraine. Botanists were called in from Earth and not only evolved strains of wheat to thrive on Codiron's mineral balance, to resist Codiron's soil viruses, but also corn, cane, citrus, melons and garden truck.

The course of Angel City's development altered. And when the wheezing taxi-boat lifted from the space-port and slanted down over Tobacco Butte, Jean was immeasurably surprised. Where she had remembered raffishness and grime she found a neat farming community, clean and apparently prosperous.

The pilot turned in his seat. "Where will I take you, miss?"

"To the hotel. Is it still Polton's Inn?"

The pilot nodded. "There's Polton's and then there's a new place downtown, the Soone House, sort of posh and expensive."

"Take me to Polton's," said Jean. It was no part of her plan to be conspicuous.

The pilot turned her an appraising glance. "You've been here before, seems like."

Jean bit her lip in annoyance. She wanted to be known as a stranger; she did not care to be associated with four dead men of seven years ago. "My father worked in the mines and he's told me about Angel City."

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IN ALL probability she was safe from recognition. Four deaths in the Angel City of seven years ago would have caused a week's sensation and then passed out of mind, to be blended with a hundred other killings. No one would think to connect Miss Alice Young, as she had decided to call herself, with the ragged wide-eyed creature that had been Jean Parlier at the age of ten. However—it was just as well to play safe. "Yes, I'll go to Polton's," said Jean.

Polton's Inn was a long ramshackle shed-roof building on a little rise overlooking the town, with a wide verandah and the front overgrown with blue pilgrim vine. In the first days of Angel City it had served as a bunk-house for miners; then as conditions became settled, Polton had added a few refinements and set himself up as innkeeper. In Jean's recollection he was a bent crabbed old man whose eyes seemed always to search the ground. He had never married and did all his own work, scorning even a scullery boy.

The pilot dropped the boat to the packed soil in front of Polton's office, turned to help, but Jean had already jumped like a cat to the ground. She ran up on the verandah, forgetting her determination to act the sedate young lady.

Polton was standing on a corner of the verandah, even more bent and crabbed than Jean had remembered.

"Well," he said in a rasping ugly voice, "you're back again. You've got your nerve with you."

Jean stared at him, drained of feeling. She opened her mouth to speak, but found no words.

"You pick up your grip," said Polton, "and get on out here. I'm running a hotel, not a madhouse. Maybe that new place downtown will put up with your hijinks. Me, I'm once bitten, then I'm shy twice."

It came to Jean that he couldn't possibly remember her from seven years back; he must be confusing her with a more recent guest. She noticed that his cheeks, near the outside corner of each eye, bulged with the tiny artificial reservoirs for aqueous humor; by contracting his cheek muscles he could pump fluid into his eyeball, thus correcting for far-sightedness. The fact seemed to indicate that his sight was not the best. Jean said with an air of sweet reason, "Mr. Polton, you're mistaking me for someone else."

"Oh no I'm not," snapped Polton, raising his lip in wolfish looseness. "I got your name on the register if you want to look. Miss Sunny Mathison you call yourself, and your fingerprints too—they show who you are."

"It wasn't me!" cried Jean. "My name is Alice Young!"

Polton made a scornful sound. "I've just spent four hundred dollars to put pumps into my old eyes. I can see like a telescope. Do you think I'm making a mistake? I don't. . . Now clear off the premises. I don't want your kind around here." He stood there glowering at her, until she turned away.

Jean shrugged, stepped forlornly back into the cab.

The pilot said sympathetically, "Old Polton's half-cracked, that's well-known. And the Soone House is a lot better place anyhow. . ."

"Okay," said Jean, "let's try the Soone House."

The cab coasted down from the height. Before them spread first the town, then Lake Arkansas, an unfamiliar checker of yellow, dark green, light green, brown and black; and finally, rising from the horizon, the steel backdrop of the sky. The blue-hot spark of Mintaka Sub-30 hung at high noon, glittered in the cab's plastic canopy and into the corner of Jean's eye.

She traced out the familiar patterns of the town: Central Square, with the concrete dance pavilion, the blue-painted courthouse and jail, with Paradise Alley ducking furtively behind. And that angular brown facade almost out at the edge of town—that was Joe Parlier's old Aztec Tavern.

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IV

THE cab settled to a plat at the rear of the new Soone House, and the pilot carried Jean's modest luggage to the side entrance. The hotel was obviously new, and made superficial pretensions to luxury, achieving only a rather ridiculous straddle between metropolitan style and the hard fact of its location in a small back-planet town. There was a fine floor of local moss agate and hand-padded mosaic-rugs from one of the cheap-labor planets, a dozen Earth palms in celadon pots. But there was no lift to the second and third floors and the porter's shoes were noticeably scuffed.

The lobby was empty except for the clerk and a man who stood talking with apparent urgency. Jean stopped short in the doorway. The man was lean and bird-like, wore his clothes with something of the same elegance that the hotel wore its mosaic rugs and Earth palms. Cholwell.

Jean calculated. It was evident that he had come out on a faster ship than hers, possibly the mail express. While she hesitated, Cholwell turned, looked at her, looked once again. His mouth snapped shut, his eyebrows met in a stiff angry bar. He took three strides forward and Jean ducked back, thinking he meant to strike her.

Cholwell said in a furious voice, "I've been looking all over town for you!"

Jean's curiosity was greater than her alarm and anger. "Well—here I am. What of it?"

Cholwell looked past her, out into the street, breathing hard controlled breaths. "You came alone?"

Jean said with narrowed eyes, "What business is it of yours?"

Cholwell blinked and his mouth set in an ugly spiteful line.

"When I get you back at the compound I'll show you what business it is of mine!"

Jean said icily, "Just what in the world are you talking about?"

"What's your name?" Cholwell cried furiously. "Let me see your—" he snatched her arm, turned over her hand, looked at the underside of her wrist.

He stared in unbelief, looked into her face, stared back at her wrist.

Jean pulled away. "Are you crazy? Life among the chickens seems to have rattled you!"

"Chickens?" He frowned. "*Chickens?*" His face went void of expression. "Oh. . . Of course. How stupid. You're Miss Jean Parlier, and you're visiting Angel City. . . I didn't expect you for another week—the next packet."

"Who did you think I was?" she asked resentfully.

Cholwell cleared his throat. Anger had given way to solicitous courtesy with startling swiftness. "It's a combination of poor vision and poor lighting. I have a niece close to your age and for a moment—" he paused delicately.

Jean glanced at her wrist. "How is it that you're not acquainted with her name?"

Cholwell said easily, "It's a little joke we have between us." He laughed self-consciously. "One of those foolish family poke, you know."

"I wonder if it was your niece that got me slung out of old Polton's place."

Cholwell became rigid. "What did Polton say?"

"He insisted that he was running a hotel, not a madhouse. He said he wouldn't put up with any more of my 'hijinks.' "

Cholwell's fingers fluttered up and down his coat. "Old Polton, I'm afraid, is more than a little contentious." A new expression came to his face, eager gallantry. "Now that you're here on Codiron, I can't wait to show you my establishment. You and—my niece will surely become fast friends."

"I'm not so sure. We're too much alike, if old Polton is hitting at all close to the truth."

Cholwell made a sound of protestation in his throat.

Jean asked, "Just what is your niece's name, Mr. Cholwell?"

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Cholwell hesitated. "It's Martha. And I'm sure Polton was exaggerating. Martha is quiet and gentle." He nodded emphatically. "I can depend on Martha."

Jean shrugged. And now Cholwell appeared to be lost in thought. He moved his elbows restlessly in and out from his body, nodded his head. At last he appeared to reach a decision. "I must be on my way, Miss Parlier. But I'll look you up on my next visit into Angel City." He bowed, departed.

Jean turned to the clerk. "I want a room. . . Does Mr. Cholwell come to town very often?"

"No-o-o," said the clerk hesitantly. "Not as often as he might."

"And his niece?"

"We see even less of her. In fact," the clerk coughed, "you might say we seldom see her."

Jean looked at him sharply. "Have you *ever* seen her?"

The clerk coughed again. "Well—actually no . . . Myself, I think Mr. Cholwell would be wiser to move into town, perhaps take a nice suite here at the hotel."

"Why so?"

"Well—Cornwall Valley is very wild, up under the Balmoral Mountains, very wild and primitive, now that they've abandoned the old Rehabilitation Home. No one near him for miles, in case of emergency. . ."

"Odd place for a chicken ranch," suggested Jean.

The clerk shrugged, as if to emphasize that it was not his place to gossip about patrons of the hotel. "Did you wish to register?"

V

JEAN changed from her gray travel gabardines into quiet dark blue and wandered along Main Street. There was a new spirit in the air, but under a few cosmetic applications of glass and stainless metal, Angel City was almost as she remembered it. Faces passed that she seemed to recognize from the old days, and one or two of these faces regarded her curiously—inconclusive in itself; she was accustomed to the feel of eyes.

At the old city courthouse and jail, a building of solid blue-painted stone-foam from the early days, she turned to the right down Paradise Alley. A small constriction formed in her throat; this was the scene of her ragged and miserable youth. . .

"Pish," said Jean. "Enough of this sentimentality. Although I suppose it's for a sentimental reason that I'm here in the first place. Why bother with a father and mother otherwise?" She considered herself in the light of a sentimentalist, with detached amusement, then returned to the eventual discovery of her parents. "It's likely I'll stir up trouble. If they're poor they'll expect me to support them. . ." She smiled, and her little teeth gleamed. "They'll expect quite a while." It occurred to her that perhaps malice was at the bottom of her mission: she pictured herself confronting a sullen man and woman, and flaunting her prosperity. "You dropped two million dollars when you dropped me on Joe Parlier's pool table."

But more likely than not, her parents, together or on their separate ways, had vanished off among the illimitable dark vistas of the human universe; then it became a problem of following a seventeen-year-old trail among the stars and planets. . . Joe Parlier might have told her of her parentage; more than once he had hinted of his knowledge. But Joe Parlier was dead, seven years dead, and Jean felt no slightest pang of regret. Sober he had been surly and heavy-handed; drunk, he was lascivious, wild and dangerous.

When she was nine he had started to handle her; soon she learned to hide under the saloon whenever she saw him drink. Once he had tried to follow her, crawling on his stomach. With an old chair leg she beat at his sweating face, jabbed at his eyes, until mad with rage he backed out to find his gun. She had

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scurried to another hiding place, and returned to her garret because there was no other place for her to go.

Next morning he had slouched up to her, his face still scratched and bruised. She had a knife and stood her ground, pale, set, desperate. But he kept his distance, railing, taunting. "Sure you're a little devil and sure I'm the only pa you got—but I know more'n I let on. And anytime there comes a showdown I know where to go. I can bring it home too, and then it'll go hard on someone."

But she had killed Joe Parlier with his own gun, Joe and three of his drunken cronies, before he had ever told what he knew.

DOWN Paradise Alley she walked, and there it was ahead of her, Joe Parlier's saloon, the old Aztec Tavern, and changed by not a line or a board. The paint was duller and the swinging doors more battered, but even out in the street the smell of tobacco, beer, wine and spirits brought back hard and clear the first ten years of her life. She raised her eyes, up to the window under the gable—her private little outlook, down into the street and across to Dion Mulroney's second-hand store.

Joe Parlier was dead, but he had spoken of proof and tapped his old brown wallet with heavy significance. Perhaps his effects had not been destroyed, and here would be her first goal.

She slipped demurely into the saloon.

There were a few minor changes, but in general the tavern was as she remembered it. The bar ran down the room to the left; behind were six large color transparencies set into the wall like stained glass windows. Each depicted a nude woman in an artistic pose against a background intended to represent outworld scenery. A crudely painted legend above read, "Beauty Among the Planets."

Tables occupied the right side of the room; above on a shelf were dusty photographs of space-ships and models of the four Gray Line packets serving Codiron, the *Bucyrus*, the *Orestes*, the *Prometheus* and the *Icarus*. At the back were the two dilapidated pool tables, a line of mechanical game machines, a vendor of dry stimulants and narcotics, and a juke-box.

Jean anxiously scanned the faces along the bar, but recognized none of the old-time habitués. She slid up on a seat near the door.

The bartender wiped his hands on his towel, elevated his jaw, strode toward her. He was a striking young man with dark brown skin and crisp wheat-blond hair. He evidently thought well of his aquiline profile and emphasized his muscular torso by the tight fit of his shirt. Vain, silly, single-minded, thought Jean; no doubt fancied himself as a lady-killer with his magnificent dark skin and bright hair.

He swaggered to a stop before her, looked her over with heavy-lidded eyes. Along the bar, faces turned, the hum of conversation halted.

The young bartender said, "What'll it be?"

"Just plain lemon fizz."

He leaned confidentially closer. "I'll let you in on a little secret. Better take orange."

"Why?" Jean asked breathlessly.

"We don't have no lemon." And he slapped the towel into his hand.

"Okay." Jean nodded. "Orange."

Ten minutes later he had made a date. His name was Gem Morales, he lived at Hot-shot Carlson's, and he worked day shift at the Aztec.

Jean said that she had lost her way; she had been trying to find her uncle, but somehow had missed him.

Oh, said Gem Morales, who had been wondering.

Jean rose to leave, and put a dime on the counter. Gem flipped it into the cash drawer. "Eight o'clock, don't forget."

Jean forced a bright smile. Normally she liked handsome young men. She admired hard young bodies, the feel of muscular hands, breezy masculine egos. But Gem Morales jarred her. He was

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cocksure, flip and brassy, without the redeeming qualities of intelligence and humor.

VI

HE ARRIVED to keep his date a studious twenty minutes late, and swaggered across the lobby to where she sat reading a magazine. He wore an extreme suit of fawn plion, with copper piping; Jean was in modest dark blue and white.

He took her to a smart little air-boat four or five years old, and she saw with a twinge of wry amusement that it was a Marshall Moon-chaser of the model she herself coveted. Darn it, back on Earth, first thing she'd do would be to buy herself a shiny new air-boat.

"Jump in, honey. We fly high, fly low, we got half a planet to cover, and there's only fourteen hours to Codiron night."

The boat growled up with a lunge that pressed Jean back into the foam, then levelled off and flew through the iron-colored night. Directly above hung Codiron's lone satellite, small bright Sadiron. Below were the black buttes, the desolate mountains, the tundras wadded over with olive-drab bear fungus. Once they skimmed over a dreary little settlement, marked by a line of yellow lights; a few minutes later a faint glow in the south indicated the location of Delta, Codiron's largest city.

"Gem," said Jean, "is your home here in Angel City?"

He snorted with indignation. "Me? Here? Gad! I should say not. I'm from Brackstell on Alnitak Five."

"How come you're out here then?"

He jerked his shoulders flippantly. "Got into a little trouble. Guy figured I wasn't as tough as I said I was. He was wrong, I was right."

"Oh."

He slipped his arm around her. She said, "Gem, I need help."

"Sure, anything you say. But later. Let's talk about us."

"No, Gem, I'm serious."

He made a cautious inquiry. "How do you mean, help? What can I do?"

She wove him a tale with overtones of the illicit strong enough to arouse his interest. She had discovered, so she said, that the old owner of the Aztec, Joe Parlier, had owned bonds which he considered valueless. Actually they were worth a great deal, and were supposed to be somewhere among his effects. She wanted an opportunity to look for them.

Gem's pleasure was disturbed by the thought that Jean's presence was not the direct result of his appearance and personality. Half-sullenly he jerked the Moon-chaser down toward a high mountain-top spangled with blue, green and red lights.

"Skylark Haven," he said. Pretty nice place—for Codiron, that is. The live ones come here from all over the planet."

Skylark Haven indeed appeared gay and popular. A hexagonal pylon reared fifty feet into the air, shimmering with waves of color, a representation of the sound-light crystals by which Codiron was known. The shifting colors reflected garishly from the hulls, domes and canopies of air-boats parked beside the building.

Gem seized Jean's arm, strode across the outside terrace, holding his aquiline profile p r i d e f u l l y out-thrust. Jean trotted along beside, half-amused, half-exasperated.

They entered the building through an arch in a great wall of bear-fungus, smelling pleasantly pungent. A man in black ushered them into a little circular booth with a flourish. As they seated themselves the booth moved slowly off, circling and t w i s t i n g with silken smoothness on a long eccentric circuit of the room.

A waitress in translucent black slid up on power-skates. "Old-fashioned," said Gem. "Lemon fizz," said Jean.

Gem raised his eyebrows. "Gad! Take a drink! That's what you're here for!"

"I don't like to drink."

"Pah!" said Gem scornfully.

Jean shrugged. Plainly Gem considered her something of a blue-stocking...

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If she liked him better, it would have been fun letting him discover otherwise. But he was not only arrogant, he was callow to boot.

AN ATTENDANT came offering power-skates for rent. Gem looked at Jean challengingly. She shook her head. "I'm too clumsy. I fall all over myself."

"It's easy," said Gem. "Look at those two—" he pointed to a couple dancing with easy effortless sweeps and circles. "You'll catch on. It's easy. Just turn your toe where you want to go, press a little and you're there. The harder you press, the faster you move. To stop, you press on your heel."

Jean shook her head. "I'd rather just sit here and talk."

"About those bonds?"

She nodded. "If you help me, I'll cut you in for a third."

He pursed his lips, narrowed his eyes. Jean realized that he was considering the feasibility of three thirds rather than one.

"Joe Parlier loaded up on lots of junk," said Jean carelessly. "Some of the bonds were stolen, and whoever presented them would have a lot of explaining to do. I know which are valuable and safe."

"Mmmph." Gem drank his Old-fashioned.

Jean said, "I don't know who owns the Aztec now; for all I know all Joe's things might have been burnt up."

"I can set you right there," said Gem thoughtfully. "The attic's full of old junk, and Godfrey says it's all left over Parlier. He's been going to clean it out but never gets around to it."

Jean drank her lemon fizz to hide her excitement. "What time does the place open?"

"Ten o'clock. I open up. I'm the day man."

"Tomorrow," said Jean, "I'll be there at nine."

"We'll be there together," said Gem. He leaned forward, took her hands meaningfully. "You're too pretty to be let out of my sight for—"

There was a skirl and scrape of skates. A harsh voice cried, "You get your hands off my girl!" And a tough round face glared into the booth. Jean noticed a mop of black curls, a wide stock frame.

Gem stared an instant, overcome by surprise and rage. He jumped to his feet, "Don't you tell me what to do, you—"

The black-haired youth had turned to Jean with a bitter expression. "As far as I'm concerned, Jade, you can go to hell."

He turned, stalked off.

Gem sat still as a statue. Jean saw a curious change come over his features. He had forgotten her completely, he was looking after the black-haired youth. His mouth broke into a humorless grin, but his eyelids, rather than drooping, lifted up, and his eyes took on a vitreous glaze. Slowly he rose to his feet.

Jean said in a matter-of-fact voice, "Don't be a child. Sit down and behave yourself."

He paid her no heed. Jean drew back a little. Gem was dangerous. "Sit down," she said sharply.

Gem's grin became a grimace. He vaulted the railing of the booth, quietly, stealthily, went after the black-haired youth.

Jean sat impatiently, tipping her glass back and forth across the table. Let them fight. . . Young bulls, young boars. . . She hoped the black-haired boy would wipe up the ground with Gem. Of course he had originally started the trouble. What did he mean, calling her Jade? She'd never seen him before. Could the ubiquitous Martha Cholwell be blamed? She seemed to precede Jean everywhere. Jean glanced around the floor with new interest.

Fifteen minutes passed before Gem returned to the table. The madness had left his face. He was bruised, torn and dirty, but clearly he had been the victor. Jean saw it in his swagger, in the tilt of his handsome dark brown head. . . Fool-

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ish young animal, thought Jean, without emotion.

He swung his legs back into the booth, rather stiffly, Jean noted. "Fixed that guy for a while," he said in a pleasant voice. Jean's vocabulary was not particularly extensive, and the word "catharsis" was not familiar to her. She thought to herself, "He's taken out his meanness on that black-haired boy and he feels better. He'll probably be halfway decent for a while."

And indeed Gem was quiet and almost self-effacing the remainder of the evening. At midnight he suggested leaving.

Jean made no protest. There had been no further sign of the black-haired youth or of anyone she could identify as Cholwell's niece.

In the air-boat he pulled her to him and kissed her passionately. Jean resisted a moment, then relaxed. Why not? she thought. It was easier than fighting him off. Though in a way she hated contributing further to his self-esteem. . . .

VII

SUNRISE on Codiron was accompanied by a phenomenon unique in the entire universe: a curtain of blue-white light dropping down the western sky line like an eyelid. It was as if a plug under the horizon had been pulled to let the darkness gush swiftly away, leaving behind the ice-color of Codiron day. The effect was ascribed to a fluorescent component of the air which became activated by Mintaka Sub-30's actinic light, and the sharp line of separation was explained by reference to the minute size of Mintaka Sub-30's disk—nearly a point source of light.

Jean slipped quietly from her room in time to witness the occurrence. Main Street was long and empty, steeped in blue gloom. Wind swept up the street, cut into her face. She licked her lips hungrily, and wondered where breakfast could be found. At one time a slatternly coffee-house down Paradise Alley served late-hour drunks, gamblers and surfeited patrons of the town's two brothels; perhaps the place was still in operation.

Jean shivered in the wind sweeping down from Codiron's desolate rocks, pulled the dark blue jacket close around her neck. Under her clothes she felt sticky, but so early there was not hot water for a bath—one of the petty economies by which the Soone House had achieved flashy trim for the street front. Superficial glitter, inner deficiency, like certain human beings, and the picture of Gem Morales came to her mind. Her mouth curled in a wintry smile. Arrogant opinionated creature. He had swaggered away from Soone House very satisfied with himself. . . She dismissed him from her mind. He was an atom in a vast universe; let him enjoy himself, so long as he forwarded her own goals.

She shivered. It was really very cold and very early to be undertaking such a business. The attic would reek of damp tobacco smoke, beer and whiskey fumes. Accumulated dirt and dust would be clammy under her fingers, but she could not expect her quest to be a round of pleasure. And it would be less complex to sort out Joe Parlier's old belongings before Gem Morales arrived on the scene.

She made the familiar turn past the courthouse into Paradise Alley, and saw ahead the yellow glow of the New York Cafe. She slipped in, took a seat at the counter next to a wheezing farm laborer still stupid from his revelry of the previous night. Quietly she drank coffee and ate toast, watching herself in the mirror behind the counter—a very pretty girl with heavy black hair cut short a skin like a pane of ivory with golden light behind, a wide pale-rose mouth in a delicate jaw structure, black eyes that might be wide with excitement or long and narrow and veiled with heavy lashes. . . I'll be pretty a long time thought Jean, if I don't let myself go stale. It's the look of vitality—aliveness—that does so much for me. I hope it's not just because I'm seventeen: ado

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lescent, so to speak. It's more than that.

She finished her coffee, slipped back into Paradise Alley. Behind her, blue-white morning light shone down Main Street; corners and protuberances caught the glow and shone as with St. Elmo's Fire.

AHEAD, dingy and dark, rose the front of Joe Parlier's old Aztec Tavern, the earliest home of her memory.

She slipped around to the back, entered by a well-remembered way: up to the roof of the little storage shed, where a yank at a panel of apparently solid louvres provided an opening. Then through, writing and panting, to land breathless and scraped on the narrow stairs to the garret.

She listened. No sound.

Without hesitation she ran up the stairs, pulled open the dingy frame door.

She paused in the doorway, and memories flooded up to choke her throat and fill her with pity for the dark-eyed little wretch that had once slept here.

She blinked, and then set emotion to one side. She looked around the garret. Light seeped through the dirty window to show her a pile of dusty boxes, all that remained of leering Joe Parlier.

As she had feared, it was dusty, damp and clammy, and smelled of the bar below.

In the first box she found bills, receipts, cancelled checks. The second held a photograph album, which she laid aside, and a number of sound tapes. The third box contained—she raised her head alertly. A stealthy creak in the floor. Jean, sighed, turned her head.

Gem Morales stood looking through the door. He was half-smiling, lips drawn back over his teeth—a thoroughly unpleasant expression.

"Thought I'd find you here," he said softly.

"I thought I'd find *you* here," said Jean.

He took a step into the room. "You thieving little—"

Jean saw that his expression was passing through the sequence of the night before. She tensed herself. In another minute . . .

She said, "Gem."

"Yes?"

"Are you afraid to die?"

He made no answer, but stood watching like a cat.

She said, "If you're not very careful—you're going to die."

He stepped forward easily.

"Don't come any closer."

His body loomed above her; he bent slightly, reaching forward.

"Two more steps, Gem. . . ."

She showed him what she held in her hand, a little metal box no larger than a match-case. From a tiny hole in its side a sliver of a dart would plunge six inches into a human body, and the little thread of mitrox would explode.

Gem stopped short. "You wouldn't dare. You wouldn't *dare* to kill me!" His mental powers were insufficient to envision a universe without Gem Morales. With a supple motion of his shoulders he lunged forward.

The dart whispered across the air, ruffled his shirt front. She heard the internal *thump* saw the outward heave of his chest, felt the quiver in the floor when his body struck.

She grimaced, slowly tucked the dart-box back in her sleeve. She turned back to the boxes. Perhaps she should not have led Gem on with the tale of hidden wealth; it wasn't really fair to dangle temptation before one so vain and so weak.

She sighed, opened the third box. It contained calendars, as did the fourth. Joe Parlier had saved calendars, marking off day after day with red crayon and each year laying the record of used-up time to rest. Jean had seen him scribble in the spaces; possibly it had been memoranda. At the time she had been unable to read.

She leafed back seventeen years, searched along the chain of days. January, February, March—a scribble in faded black ink caught her eye: "Tell

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Mollie, for the last time, to call for her damned brat."

Mollie.

Mollie was her mother's name. And who was Mollie? Joe's mistress? Was it possible that Joe himself had been her father?

She considered, decided in the negative. Too many times Joe had vilified the fate that made him her keeper. And she remembered when Joe had the horrors after a terrible bellowing drunk. She had dropped a pan to the floor; the clang had jangled the discordant skein of his nerves.

Joe had cried out in a voice like a cornet; he cursed her presence, her eyes, her teeth, the very air she breathed. He told her in a reckless wild voice that he'd as soon kill her as look at her, that he only kept her until she grew old enough to sell. It settled the question. If she had been a part of him, he would have coddled her, given her his best; she would have been a vicarious new start in life for him.

Joe was not her father.

But who was Mollie?

She picked up the photograph album —froze to silence. Footsteps in the street outside. They stopped. She heard the outside door rattle, a voice call out something she could not understand. There was a rattle, then footsteps dying away. Then there was silence.

Jean seated herself on a box and opened the album.

VIII

THE FIRST pictures dated from Joe Parlier's childhood. There were a dozen shots of a stilt-house on Venus, evidently along the Brandy Coast. A sallow little boy in tattered pink shorts that she recognized as Joe stood beside a buxom hard-faced woman. A few pages later Joe had become a young man, posing beside an old Duraflite air-wagon. Behind were sagging brown and white tassel-trees; the locale was still Venus. On the next page was a single picture, a pretty girl with rather an empty expression. Scrawled in green ink were the words, "Too bad, Joe."

The scene changed to Earth: there were pictures of a bar, a restaurant, a large tableau with Joe placid and pompous among a dozen men and women, apparently his employees.

There were only a few more pictures in the album; evidently Joe's enthusiasm for pictures declined with his fortunes. Of these two were professional photographs of a brass-blond woman, apparently an entertainer, smiling hugely. The inscription read, "To a Good Guy, Wirlie."

There was one more photograph. It showed the Aztec Tavern of twenty years before, so Jean judged by Joe's appearance. He stood in the doorway flanked on one side by two bartenders in short sleeves, a porter, a man Jean recognized as a gambler; on the other side by four bold-looking women in provocative poses. The legend read: "Joe and the Gang." Under each figure was a name: "Wirlie, May, Tata, Mollie, Joe, Steve, Butch, Carl, Hopham."

—Mollie! With a dry mouth Jean scrutinized the face. Her mother? A big beefy woman with a truculent look. Her features were small, kneaded, doughy: a face like a jar full of pig's-feet.

Mollie. Mollie what? If her profession were what it seemed, the chance that she still lived in the neighborhood was small.

Jean petulantly went back to the calendar, turned back the months. . . . Two years before the date of her birth she found a notation, "Collect bail refund on Mollie and May."

There was nothing more. Jean sat a moment pondering. If this revolting Mollie were her mother, who might her father be? Jean sniffed. It was doubtful if Mollie herself knew.

With a conscious effort Jean returned to the lard-colored face, the little pig eyes. It hurt. So this is Mother. Her eyes suddenly flooded with tears, her mouth twitched. She went on looking,

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as if it were some kind of penance. What in her arrogance had she expected? A Pontemma baronet and his lady, living in a white marble castle? . . . "I wish I hadn't been so nosy," said Jean mournfully. She sighed. "Maybe I have a distinguished father."

The idea amused her. "He must have been very, very drunk."

She detached the photograph, tucked it in her pocket, rose uncertainly to her feet. Time to go.

She repacked the boxes, stood looking indecisively at Gem's body. It wasn't nice leaving him here in the garret. . . . Nothing about Gem was very nice. He might lay here weeks, months. She felt a small queasiness in her stomach which she repressed angrily. "Be sensible, you fool."

Better wipe up fingerprints. . . . There was a rattle, a pounding at the front door, a hoarse voice called, "Gem! . . . Gem!"

Jean ran to the door. Time to go. Someone must have seen Gem enter.

She slipped down the stairs, wiggled out the louvre opening to the shed roof, carefully pushed the louvres home. She slid to the ground, ducked over a sagging fence into Aloha Place.

Ten minutes later she was back in her room at the Soone House, throwing off her clothes for a shower.

THE SLEEK and lazy clerk in the courthouse grumbled when Jean modestly approached him with her request.

"Oh, please," said Jean, smiling half-sidelong, an old ruse. It invested her with wistful appeal, magic daring, an unthinkable unimaginable proffer.

The clerk licked his wine-colored old lips. "Oh . . . Very well. Little girl like you should be home with your mother. Well?" he asked sharply. "What are you laughing at?"

Jean did not think it wise to mention that her mother was the topic of her inquiry.

Together they pored over the records, sliding tape after tape through the screen.

"That year we was busy as bees," grumbled the clerk. "But we ought to find that name if—well, now, here's a Mollie. Mollie Salomon. That the one? Arrested for vagrancy and narcotic addiction on January 12, remanded to the Rehabilitation Home February 1. Bail posted by Joe Parlier, man used to run the saloon down Paradise Alley."

"That's her," said Jean excitedly. "When was she discharged?"

The clerk shook his head. "We wouldn't have no record of that. Must have been when her addiction was cleared up, a year or two."

Jean calculated, chewing her lip with little sharp teeth, frowning. That would put Mollie back in circulation something before the date of her own birthday.

The clerk watched like an old gray cat, but made no comment.

Jean asked hesitantly, "I don't suppose this—Mollie Salomon lives around here now?"

The clerk showed signs of uneasiness, twitching a decorative tassel on his lapel. "Well, young lady, it's hardly the kind of place you'd be apt to care about. . . ."

"What's the address?"

The clerk raised his head, met her glance. Quietly he said, "It's out on Meridian Road, past El Panatela. The Ten-Mile House."

Meridian Road led into the uplands, winding around the three volcanic necks which ruled the Angel City skyline, dipping like a humming-bird into each of the old mines, lining out into Plaghank Valley. Ten miles along the road was six miles by air, and in minutes after rising from Soone House, the cab set Jean down by a ramshackle old building.

Wherever men worked and produced and made money in hard and hostile back-country, Ten-Mile Houses appeared. When towns were built, when civilization brought comfort and moderation, the Ten-Mile Houses became quiet back-

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waters, drowsing through the years in a mellow amber gloom. The rooms became dusty and footfalls sounded loud where once only silence would have been noticed.

When Jean marched briskly up the stone-foam steps the downstairs saloon was empty. The bar extended along the back wall with the mirror behind overhung with a hundred souvenirs of the old days: choice sound-light crystals, fossils of Trotters and other extinct Codiron life-forms, drills, a tableau of six miner's hats, each painted with a name.

A voice rasped suspiciously, "What you want, girl?"

She turned, saw a hawk-nosed old man sitting in a corner. His eyes were blue and sharp; with his ruff of white hair he reminded her of an old white parakeet disturbed from its sleep.

"I'm looking for Mollie," said Jean. "Mollie Salomon."

"Nobody here by that name; what do you want her for?"

"I want to talk."

The old man's jaws moved up and down as if he were chewing something very hot. "What about?"

"If she wants you to know—she'll tell you herself."

The old man's chin wrinkled. "Pretty pert, ain't you?"

Soft footsteps sounded behind Jean; a woman in a drab evening gown entered the room, stood looking at Jean with an obvious expression of hunger and envy.

The old man barked, "Where's Mollie?"

The woman pointed at Jean. "Is she coming to work? Because I won't put up with it. I'll make trouble; the minute a young tart like that sets her—"

"I just want to talk to Mollie."

"She's upstairs . . . Cleaning the carpet." She turned to the old man. "Paisley did it again. If you'd keep that old drunk outa here, I'd thank you kindly for it."

"Money is money."

IX

GINGERLY Jean started to climb the stairs, but a large female figure blocked the passage.

She was carrying a bucket and a brush. As she came into the light, Jean recognized the woman in Joe Parlier's photograph, modified by twenty years of ill health, bad temper, a hundred pounds of sour flesh.

"Mollie?" ventured Jean. "Are you Mollie Salomon?"

"That's me. What about it?"

"I'd like to talk to you. In private."

Mollie looked her over briefly, darted a bitter glance into the saloon where the old man and the woman sat listening with undisguised interest. "All right, come on out here."

She pushed open a rickety door, waddled out on a side porch overlooking a sad little garden of rattle-bush, pilgrim vine, rusty fungus. She sank into a wicker chair that squeaked under her weight.

"What's the story?"

Jean's imaginings had never quite envisioned a meeting like this. What was there to say? Looking into the pudgy white face, conscious of her sour woman-reek, the words came haltingly to her mouth . . . Sudden anger flared inside Jean.

"Seventeen years ago you left a baby with Joe Parlier in Angel City. I want to know who the father was."

Mollie Salomon's face changed by not a twitch. After a moment she said in a low harsh voice, "I've often wondered how that baby turned out. . . ."

Jean asked in sudden hope, "It wasn't your own baby?"

Mollie laughed bitterly. "Don't run away with yourself. It was my brat, no doubt of that, no doubt at all . . . How did you find out?"

"Joe left a kind of diary . . . Who was the father? Was it Joe?"

The woman drew herself up into a ludicrous exposition of dignity. "Joe Parlier? Humph, I should say not."

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"Who then?"

Mollie inspected Jean through crafty eyes. "You look like you're doing well in the world."

Jean nodded. "I knew it would come to this. How much?"

Mollie's price was surprisingly modest—perhaps the gauge of importance she put on the matter. "Oh ten, twenty dollars, just to pay for my time."

Jean would have given her a hundred, a thousand. "Here."

"Thank you," said Mollie Salomon with prim gentility. "Now I'll tell you what I know of the affair, which to my way of thinking is one of the queerest things I've ever heard of."

Jean said impatiently, "Never mind that, who is my father?"

Mollie said, "Nobody."

"Nobody?"

"Nobody."

Jean was silent a moment. Then: "There must have been someone."

Mollie said with dignity, "There's no-one that should know better than me, and I'll tell you that for sure."

"Maybe you were drunk?" suggested Jean hopefully.

Mollie inspected her critically. "Pretty wise for a little snip your age . . . Ah, well, dreary me, I wasn't far behind you, and I was more'n cute . . . Look at me now, you'd never guess it, me that's been doin' slops at Ten-Mile House for over twelve years. . .."

"Who is my father?"

"Nobody."

"That's impossible!"

Mollie shook her head. "That's the way it happened. And how do I know? Because I was out in the Rehabilitation Home, and I'd been out there two years. Then I look down one day, I say, 'Mollie, you're getting big.' And then I say, 'Must be gas.' And the next day I say, 'Mollie, if it wasn't that this damn jail is run like a goldfish tank, with eyes on you every last minute, and you know for a fact that you haven't seen a man except old Cholwell and the Director—' "

"Cholwell!"

"Old Doc Cholwell was the medic, a cold fish. . . . Lord on high, what a cold fish. Anyway I said to myself—"

"It couldn't be that Cholwell got to you?"

Mollie snorted. "Old Cholwell? More likely pin it on Archangel Gabriel. That old—" she broke into obscene muttering. "To this day I'd like to catch that cod-faced sissy-panty, him that wouldn't let me go when my time was up! Claimed I had disease, said I had to wait it out! Nothing doing. I made my own way out. I rode the truck in, and not a thing was there to do about it, because my time was up, and I was detained out of legal order. And then—I go to the doctor, old Doc Walsh, and he says, 'Mollie, the only trouble with you is that you're just pregnant as hell.' And the next thing you know, there's the brat, and me without a crust or cooky, and needing my freedom, so I just carry her out to my good friend Joe, and a rare fuss he made too. . . ."

"How about the Director?"

"What about him?"

"Could he have—"

Mollie snorted incredulously. "Not old Fussy Richard. He never even showed his face around. Besides he was fooling around some young snip in the office."

There was the sound of humming airfoils. Jean jumped to the ground, craned her neck at the departing airboat. "Now what in Heaven's name. . . . I told him to wait. How will I get back to Angel City?"

"Well, well," said a reedy precise voice from within the saloon. "Well, well, this is indeed a quaint old relic."

Molly Salomon heaved herself to her feet. "That voice!" Her face was tinged with an unhealthy pink. "That voice, I'd never miss it, it's old Cholwell."

Jean followed her into the saloon.

"Now, you pickle-faced little freak, what brings you out here? Do you know that I've swore long and time again that if ever I caught you off your nasty Home, I'd pour slops on you, and do you know that's just what I'm going to

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do . . . Just wait for my bucket. . . ." Mollie turned and panted away down the corridor.

Jean said, "Did you send my cab away, Mr. Cholwell?"

Cholwell bowed. "Yes, Miss Parlier. I've been wanting to show you my chicken ranch, and I thought that today you might accept my invitation."

"And suppose I didn't, then how do I get back to Angel City?"

Cholwell made an elegant gesture. "Naturally I will take you anywhere you wish to go."

"And suppose I don't want to ride with you?"

Cholwell looked pained. "In that case, of course, I'm guilty of a grave imposition, and I can only offer you my apologies."

Mollie Salomon came running into the room with a bucket, puffing and sobbing with anger. Cholwell backed out into the open with considerable agility, sacrificing none of his dignity.

Mollie ran out on the porch. Cholwell retreated further acros the yard. Mollie chased him a few steps, then dashed the contents of the bucket in his direction. Cholwell dodged clear of the mess by twenty feet. Mollie shook her fist. "And don't set foot in Ten-Mile again, or there'll be worse for you, far worse, you nasty little swine." And she added further scurrility.

A squat dough-faced woman scuttling after fastidous Cholwell with a bucketful of slops was too much for Jean. She broke into delighted laughter. At the same time her eyes smarted with tears. Her father and her mother. In spite of Mollie's angry protests Cholwell owned to a daughter who resembled her, Martha, Sunny, Jade, whatever her name.

With not a glance for Jean, Mollie disappeared triumphantly into the saloon. Cholwell approached, mopping his forehead angrily. "For two cents I'd put a charge against her, and have her committed. . . ."

"Are you my father, Mr. Cholwell?" asked Jean.

Cholwell turned a bright searching glance upon her. "Whyever do you ask that, Miss Parlier? It's a very curious question."

"Mollie is my mother. She says she became pregnant while you were the only man nearby."

Cholwell shook his head decidedly. "No, Miss Parlier. Morality to one side, I assure you that I am still a man of fastidious taste and discernment."

Jean admitted to herself that a passionate combination of Cholwell and Mollie was hard to conceive. "Who, then, is my father?"

X

CHOLWELL raised his eyebrows as if in apprehension of a painful duty he felt called on to perform. "It appears that—excuse me, I will be blunt; I feel that, young as you are, you are a realist—it appears that your mother's relations with men were such as to make responsibility indefinite."

"But she was at the Rehabilitation Home; she says she never saw any other man but you."

Cholwell shook his head doubtfully. "Perhaps you'd like to visit the old Home? It's almost adjacent to my own—"

Jean snapped, "Once and for all, I'm not interested in your damn chickens. I want to go back to Angel City."

Cholwell bowed his head in defeat. "Angel City it is, and I apologize for my presumption."

Jean said shortly, "Where's your boat?"

"This way, around the bear-pad." He led around the white slab of fungus.

The air-boat was old and stately. The words *Codiron Rehabilitation Home* had been painted over, but the outlines were still legible.

Cholwell slid back the door. Jean hesitated, glanced thoughtfully back toward the Ten-Mile House.

"Something you've forgotten?" asked Cholwell courteously.

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"No . . . I guess not."

Cholwell waited patiently. Jean said angrily, "It's just this, Mr. Cholwell. I'm young and there's a lot I don't know, but—"

"Yes?"

"I've got an awful quick temper. So—let's get started. To Angel City."

"To Angel City," said Cholwell thoughtfully.

Jean jumped into the boat. Cholwell closed the door, circled the boat; then, as if struck by a sudden notion, slid back the access panel to the motor box.

Jean watched warily. He seemed to be making a minor adjustment.

The air was bad inside the cab, smelling of varnish and stale ozone. She heard the ventilation system turn on: evidently the object of Cholwell's ministrations. The air became cool and fresh. Very fresh. Smelling of pine needles and hay. Jean breathed deeply. Her nose and lungs tingled. . . . She frowned. Odd. She decided to—but Cholwell had finished, was coming around the side of the boat. He approached the door, looked in.

Jean could see his face only from the corner of her eye. She was not certain of his expression. She fancied that he nodded, smiled.

He did not immediately climb into the boat, but stood looking off across the valley toward the three volcanic necks, black stumps on the dingy sky.

The smell of pine needles and hay permeated Jean's head, her body. She was faintly indignant. . . . Cholwell at last opened the door, held it wide. The wind up Plaghank Valley swept through the boat, bringing in the familiar efflorescence of dust and hot rock.

Cholwell cautiously tested the air, finally climbed in, closed the door. The air-boat quivered; Ten-Mile House became a dilapidated miniature below. They flew north. Angel City was to the south.

Jean remonstrated, in the form of heavy breathing. Cholwell smiled complacently. "In the old days we sometimes transported obstreperous patients; very troublesome until we installed the pacifier tank and connected it to the air ducts."

Jean breathed hard.

Cholwell said indulgently, "In two hours you'll be as good as new." He began humming a song, an old-fashioned sentimental ballad.

THEY RODE over a ridge, swung in blustering wind currents, settled into a valley. A great black escarpment rose opposite. Bright blue sunlight shone along the face, reflecting from vertical ridges as if they were fringes of foil.

The boat shuddered and vibrated along the valley lower than the great black cliff. Presently a cluster of pink buildings appeared, nestled against the rock.

"Can you see our destination, there ahead?" Cholwell asked solicitously. "It will be your home for a little while—but don't let me alarm you. There will be compensations." He hummed quietly for a moment. "And your money will be put to a good cause." He darted a glance into her face. "You are skeptical? You dislike the idea? But, I insist, there will be compensations, for you become one of my—little chickens." The idea amused him. "One of my little flock. . . . But I will be discreet; I don't wish to alarm you. . . ."

The boat settled toward the sprawling cluster of pink buildings. "One of the old Trotter sites," said Cholwell in a reverent voice. "Ancient past human imagination, and a perfect sun-trap. You see, I told you no more than the truth. I must confess that the plant is neglected, sadly neglected, these days, with only myself and a small staff to tend the flock. . . . Now that we are to be affluent, perhaps we will make some changes." He scanned the group of buildings with flared nostrils. "Hideous. The worst of the century, the Rococo Revival. And pink stucco over the sound old stone-foam . . . But money can mend where wishing and hoping fails." He clicked

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his tongues. "Perhaps we will move to one of the tropical planets; this Codiron land is bleak and stern, and the black-water frost begins to worry my old bones." He laughed. "I ramble on . . . If I become a bore, you must interrupt . . . And here we are. Home."

Bright-pink walls rose up past Jean's vision. She felt a jar.

The door opened; she glimpsed Cholwell's face and the grinning yellow countenance of a spare muscular woman.

Hands helped her to the ground, hands went over her person. Her dart-box, her coiled glass-knife were taken from her; she heard Cholwell clucking in satisfaction.

Hands half-led, half-carried her into the gloom of a building.

They traversed an echoing hall lit through a row of high narrow panes. Cholwell stopped beside a heavy door, turned and his face came into the range of Jean's vision.

"When my little flock becomes restless, they must be penned securely . . . But trust wins trust, and—" his voice was lost in the rattle of the door-skids.

Jean moved forward. Face after face appeared in the channel of her vision. Startled face after startled face. As if she were looking in a succession of mirrors. Her own face looking back at her, again and again.

She felt softness beneath her, and now saw nothing but the ceiling. She heard Cholwell's voice. "This is your long-lost sister, returned to us at last. I think there'll be good news for us all shortly."

Something hot and very painful touched her wrist. She lay looking at the ceiling, breathing hard. The pain presently subsided to an ache.

Her eyelids sank shut.

JEAN STUDIED the girls covertly under her eyelids. There were six of them—slender dark-haired girls with impatient intelligent faces. They wore their hair longer than hers, and perhaps they were softer and prettier to a trifling degree. But essentially they were her. Not merely like her. They were her.

They wore a costume like a uniform—white knee-length breeches, a loose yellow blouse, black coolie sandals. Their faces suggested that they were bored and sullen, if not angry.

Jean sat up on the couch, yawned, yawned, yawned, as if she would never get enough. Her perceptions sharpened; memory returned to her.

The girls were sitting in a half-hostile circle. To understand them, Jean told herself, just put myself in their places.

"Well," said Jean, "don't just sit there."

The girls moved a trifle, each shifting her position as if by a common impulse.

"My name is Jean." She rose to her feet, stretched, smoothed back her hair. She looked around the room. A dormitory in the old Rehabilitation Home. "A hell of a rat's nest. I wonder if old Cholwell's listening?"

"Listening?"

"Does he have the place wired for sound? Can he—" she noted the lack of comprehension. "Wait. I'll take a look. Sometimes the mikes are easy to spot, sometimes not."

The pick-up button would be close to the door or close to the window, to allow the entry of wires. A radio pick-up would be conspicuous in this barren room.

She found the button where she expected to find it, over the door, with hair wires leading through the crack. She snapped it loose, displayed it to the other girls. "There. Old Cholwell could hear every word we said."

One of the girls took the thing gingerly. "So that's how he always finds out what's going on . . . How did you know it was here?"

Jean shrugged. "They're common enough . . . How come we're all locked up? Are we prisoners?"

"I don't know about you. We're being punished. When Cholwell went away to Earth, some of us rode the supply boat into Angel City . . . We don't get the

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chance very often. Cholwell was furious. He says we'll spoil everything."

"What's everything?"

She made a vague gesture. "In a little while we'll all be rich, according to Cholwell. We'll live in a fine house, we can do anything we want. First, he's got to get the money. It's been like that ever since I can remember."

"Cherry's gone after the money," said another girl.

Jean blinked. "There's another?"

"There were seven of us. You make eight. Cherry left this morning for Angel City. She's supposed to get money; I think she's taking the next packet to Earth."

"Oh," said Jean. Was it possible . . . Could it be . . . She thought she saw the scope of Cholwell's plan. She said, "Let me see your hand."

The girl held out her hand indifferently. Jean compared it with her own, squinted closely. "Look, it's the same."

"Of course it's the same."

"Why of course?"

The girl inspected Jean with a puzzled half-contemptuous expression. "Don't you know?"

Jean shook her head. "I never knew till—well, there were rumors and talk around Angel City—but until I saw you I thought I was the only one of me there was. All of a sudden there's six others."

"Seven others."

"Seven others. I'm really—well, astonished. Thunderstruck. But it hasn't sunk in yet."

"Cholwell says we should be grateful to him. But—none of us like him. He won't let us do anything."

XI

JEAN LOOKED around the six faces. They lacked some quality which she had. Fire? Willfulness? Jean tried to fathom the difference between herself and the others. They seemed as bright and as willful as she was herself. But they had not acquired the habit of thinking for themselves. There were too many of them subjected to the same stimuli, thinking the same thoughts. There was no leadership among them. She asked, "Aren't you curious about me? You don't seem to care one way or the other."

"Oh." The girl shrugged. "It'll all come out."

"Yes," said Jean. "No doubt . . . I don't like it here."

"We don't either."

"Why don't you leave? Run away?"

All the girls laughed. "Run where? Across two hundred miles of mountains and rock? And afterwards, then what? We've no money to get away from Codiron."

Jean sniffed contemptuously. "A good-looking girl can always get money."

They looked genuinely interested. "How?"

"Oh—there's ways. I guess you've never travelled very much."

"No. We see a few films and watch the television and read books."

"Cholwell picks out all the books?"

"Yes."

"The old Svengali . . . ."

"Who's he?"

"Somebody like Cholwell, only just about—no, exactly, one eighth as ambitious . . . How did it all start?"

The girl nearest her shrugged. Where the blouse had slipped back on her wrist there was a tattoo mark. Jean leaned forward, read, "Felice." Aroused by a sudden memory she looked at her own wrist. Tattooed into the ivory skin was "Jean."

Now she was really angry. "Tagging us like cattle!"

None of the others shared her indignation. "He says he has to tell us apart."

"Damned old scoundrel . . . In some way, somehow . . ." Her voice trailed away. Then: "How is it that we're all the same?"

Felice was watching her with bright calculating eyes. "You'll have to ask Cholwell. He's never told us."

"But your mothers? Who are your mothers?"

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Felice wrinkled her nose. "Let's not talk of nastiness."

The girl next to her said with a trace of malice, "You saw old Svenska, the woman that helped you in? That's Felice's mother."

"Oooh!" said Felice. "I told you never to remind me! And don't forget your own mother, the woman that died with only half a face. . . ."

Jean gritted her teeth, walked up and down the room. "I want to get out of this damn jail . . . I've been in jails and homes and camps and orphan asylums before; I've always got out. Somehow." She looked suspiciously around the six faces. "Maybe you're all stringing in with Cholwell. I'm not."

"We're not either. But there's nothing we can do."

"Have you ever thought of killing him?" Jean asked sarcastically. "That's easy enough. Stick him once with a good knife, and he'll change his mind the next time he wants to lock people up . . . I'll stick him if I get a chance. . . ."

There was silence around the room.

Jean continued, "Do you know whose money Cherry is going after? No? Well, it's mine. I've got lots of it. And as soon as Cholwell knew it, he began scheming how to get it. Now he thinks he'll send Cherry to my trustee. He's told her what to do, how to pry at Mycroft. Mycroft won't know the difference. Because she's not only like me. She *is* me. Even our fingerprints, our handprints."

"Of course."

Jean cried out angrily, "The trouble with you is that you've never had to work or fight; you've sat around like pets. Chickens, Cholwell calls you. And now all your guts are gone. You put up with this—this. . . ." Words failed her. She made a furious gesture around the room.

"You don't fight. You let him treat you like babies. Somehow he got us away from our mothers, somehow he treated us, molded us so that we're all the same, somehow—"

A DRY CUTTING voice said, "Very interesting, Jean . . . May I have a few minutes with you please?"

There was a rustle of movement, apprehension. Cholwell stood in the doorway. Jean glared over her shoulder, marched out into the corridor.

Cholwell conducted her with grave courtesy to a cheerful room furnished as an office, taking a seat behind a modern electric desk. Jean remained standing, watching him defiantly.

Cholwell picked up a pencil, held it suspended between two fingers. He chose his words carefully.

"It becomes clear that you constitute a special problem."

Jean stamped her feet. "I don't care about your problems, I want to get back to Angel City. If you think you can keep me here very long, you're crazy!"

Cholwell inspected the pencil with every evidence of interest. "It's a very peculiar situation, Jean. Let me explain it, and you'll see the need for cooperation. If we all work together—you, me and the other girls—we can all be rich and independent."

"I'm rich already. And I'm independent already."

Cholwell smiled gently. "But you don't want to share your wealth with your sisters?"

"I don't want to share my wealth with old Polton, with you, with the cab driver, with the captain of the *Bucyrus* . . . Why should I want to share it with them?" She shook her head furiously. "No, sir, I want to get out of here, right now. And you'd better see to it, or you'll run into so darn much trouble—"

"In regard to money," said Cholwell smoothly, "out here we share and share alike."

Jean sneered. "You had it figured out from the first time you saw me in Mr. Mycroft's office. You thought you'd get me out here and send in one of your girls to collect. But you've got Mr. Mycroft wrong. He won't be hurried or rushed. Your girl Cherry won't get very much from him."

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"She'll get enough. If nothing else we'll have the income on two million dollars. Somewhere around fifty thousand dollars a year. What more do we want?"

Jean's eyes were flooding with tears of anger. "Why do you risk keeping me alive? Sooner or later I'll get away, I'll get loose, and I won't care who gets hurt. . . ."

"My dear girl," Cholwell chided gently. "You're overwrought. And there's so much of the background that you're not aware of; it's like the part of an ice-berg that's below the water. Let me tell you a little story. Sit down, my dear, sit down."

"Don't 'my dear' me, you old—"

"Tut, tut." He put away his pencil, leaned back. "Twenty years ago I was Resident Physician here at the Rehabilitation Home. Then of course it was still in full operation." He looked at her sharply. "All of this must remain confidential, do you understand?"

Jean started to laugh wildly, then a remark of monumental sarcasm came to her tongue. But she restrained herself. If old Cholwell were so eaten up with vanity, if the need for an intelligent ear were so extreme that he must use her, so much the better.

She made a non-committal sound. Cholwell watched her with veiled eyes, chuckled as if he were following the precise chain of her thoughts.

"No matter, no matter," said Cholwell. "But you must never forget that you owe me a great deal. Humanity owes me a great deal." He sat cherishing the thought, rolling the overtones along his mental palate. "Yes, a great deal. You girls, especially. Seven of you—it might be said—owe me your actual existences. I took one and I made eight."

Jean waited.

"Seventeen years ago," said Cholwell dreamily, "the director of the Home entered into an indiscreet liaison with a young social worker. The next day, fearing scandal if pregnancy developed, the director consulted me, and I agreed to examine the young woman. I did so and by a very clever bit of filtration I was able to isolate the fertilized egg. It was an opportunity for which I had been waiting. I nourished the egg. It divided—the first step on its march to a complete human being. Very carefully I separated the two cells. Each of these divided again, and again I separated the doublets. Once more the cells separated; once more I—"

Jean breathed a deep sigh. "Then Mollie isn't my mother after all. It's almost worth it. . . ."

XII

THE DOCTOR reproved Jean with a look. "Don't anticipate. . . . Where I had a single individual, I had eight. Eight identities. I let these develop normally, although I suppose I could have continued the process almost indefinitely . . . After a few days, when the cells had become well established, I brought eight healthy women prisoners into the dispensary. I drugged them with a hyphotic, and after priming them with suitable hormones, I planted a zygote in the womb of each."

Cholwell settled comfortably in his chair, laughed. "Eight pregnancies, and never have I seen women so amazed. One of these women, Mollie Salomon, was granted a remission and left the Home before the birth of her child. My child, I suppose I should say. She actually had very little to do with it. By a series of mishaps I lost her and this eighth child." He shook his head regretfully. "It left an unpleasant gap in the experiment—but after all, I had my seven . . . And then, seventeen years later, in Metropolis on Earth, I wander into an office and there—you! I knew that Destiny moved with me."

Jean licked her lips. "If Mollie isn't my real mother—who is?"

Cholwell made a brusque motion. "A matter of no importance. It's best that the direct correspondence be forgotten."

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Jean said casually, "What is your goal? You've proved the thing can be done; why do you keep the poor girls hidden out here on Codiron?"

Cholwell winked roguishly. "The experiment is not quite at an end, my dear."

"No?"

"No. The first phase was brilliantly successful; now we will duplicate the process. And this time I will broadcast my own seed. I want eight great sons. Eight fine Cholwell boys."

Jean said in a small voice, "That's silly."

Cholwell winked and blinked. "Not at all. It's one of humanities most compelling urges, the desire for offspring."

"People usually work it out differently . . . And it won't work."

"Won't work? Why on earth not?"

"You don't have access to foster-mothers as you had before. There's no—" She stopped short, almost bit her tongue.

"Obviously, I need search no farther then my own door. Eight healthy young girls, in the springtime flush of life."

"And the mother?"

"Any one of my eight. Dorothy, Jade, Bernice, Felice, Sunny, Cherry, Martha—and Jean. Any one of you."

Jean moved restlessly. "I don't want to be pregnant. Normally or any other way."

Cholwell shook his head indulgently. "It admittedly represents a hardship."

"Well," said Jean. "Whatever you're planning—don't include me. Because I'm not going to do it, I don't care what you say."

Cholwell lowered his head, and a faint pink flush rose in his cheeks. "My dear young woman—"

"Don't 'my dear young woman' me."

The telescreen buzzer sounded. Cholwell sighed, touched the button.

Jean's face shone from the screen, frightened and desperate. Behind was an official-looking room, two attentive men in uniform.

Cherry, no doubt, thought Jean.

At the sight of Cholwell's face, Cherry cried out in a quick rush, "—got me into this thing, Dr. Cholwell; you get me out of it!"

Cholwell blinked stupidly.

Cherry's narrow vivid face glowed with anger and indignation. "Do something! Say something!"

"But—what about?" demanded Cholwell.

"They've arrested me! They say I killed a man!"

"Ah," said Jean with a faint smile.

Cholwell jerked forward. "Just what is all this?"

"It's crazy!" cried Cherry. "I didn't do it! I didn't even know him—but they won't let me go!"

Behind her one of the policemen said in a gruff voice, "You're wasting your time and ours, sister. We've got you so tight you'll never get out."

"Dr. Cholwell—they say they can execute me, kill me for something I didn't do!"

Cholwell said in a guarded voice, "They can't prove it was you if it wasn't."

"They why don't they let me go?"

Cholwell rubbed his chin. "When did the murder occur?"

"I think it was just this morning."

"It's all nonsense," said Cholwell in relief. "You were out here this morning. I can vouch for that."

Behind the girl one of the policemen laughed hoarsely. Cherry cried, "But they say my fingerprints were on him! The sheriff says there's absolutely no doubt!"

"Ridiculous!" Cholwell burst out in a furious high-pitched voice.

ONE OF the policemen leaned forward. "It's a clear-cut case, Cholwell. Otherwise your girl wouldn't be talking with you so free and easy. Me, I've never seen a cleaner case, and I'll bet a hundred dollars on the verdict."

"They'll kill me," wept Cherry. "That's all they talk about!"

"Barbarous!" Cholwell stormed.

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"Damned savages! And they boast about civilization here on Codiron!"

"We're civilized enough to catch our murderers," observed the sheriff equably. "And also fix it so they murder only once."

"Have you ever heard of de-aberration?" Cholwell asked in a biting voice.

The sheriff shrugged. "No use singing that song, Cholwell. This is still honest country. When we catch a murderer, we put him where he won't bother nobody. None of this fol-de-rol and fancy-hospitals for us; we're plain folk."

Cholwell said carefully, "Why are you trying to pin it on—this girl?"

"There's eye-witnesses," said the sheriff complacently. "Two people identify her positively as entering the place where this Gem Morales was killed. There's half a dozen others that saw her in Paradise Alley at about the right time. Absolute identification, no question about it; she ate breakfast in the New York Cafe. And to tie on the clincher, there's her fingerprints all over the scene of the murder . . . I tell you, Cholwell, it's a case!"

Cherry cried desperately, "Dr. Cholwell, what shall I do? They won't let me—I just can't make them believe—"

Cholwell's face was a white mask. He said in a taut voice, "I'll call you back in a little while."

He turned off the contact. The screen died on the contorted face.

Jean sighed tremulously. Witnessing the scene had been more frightening than if she had been directly involved; it was watching herself in terror and unable to move a muscle to help: a nightmare where the feet refuse to move.

Cholwell was thinking, watching her from eyes which suddenly seemed detestably reptilian. He said, enunciating with faint sibilance, "You killed this man. You devil's imp."

Jean's wide flexible mouth spread into a smile. "What if I did?"

"You've ruined my plans!"

Jean shrugged. "You brought me out here. You sent her into Angel City to catch the packet—to go after my money. She was supposed to be me. That's what you wanted. Fine. Excellent." She laughed, a silver tinkle. "It's really funny, Cholwel."

A new thought struck Cholwell. He sank back into his chair. "It's not funny. . . It's terrible. It breaks up the octet. If she's found guilty and killed by those barbarians in Angel City, the circle is broken, this time irrevocably."

"Oh," said Jean brightly. "You're worried about Cherry's death because it —ruins the symmetry of your little circle?"

"You don't understand," Cholwell said in a waspish voice. "This has been my goal for so long. . . I had it, then *phwish—*" he jerked his hand, raised his eyebrows despairingly "—out of my reach."

"It's none of my business," Jean mused, "except that she's so much me. It makes me feel funny to see her scared. I don't care a cent for you."

Cholwell frowned dangerously.

Jean continued. "But—it should be easy to get her loose."

"Only by turning you in," Cholwell gloomed. "And that would bring publicity to bear on all of us, and we can't stand that just yet. I wouldn't be able to carry through. . ."

Jean looked at him as if she were seeing him for the first time. "You're actually serious about that?"

"Serious? Of course I'm serious." He glared angrily. "I don't understand what you're getting at."

"If I were really hard-hearted," said Jean, "I'd sit back and have a good laugh. It's so terribly funny. And cruel. . . I guess I'm not as mean and tough as I think I am. Or maybe it's because she's—me." She felt the glare of Cholwell's eyes. "Don't get me wrong. I don't plan to run into town, bare my bosom and say 'I did it'. But there's a very simple way to get her off."

"So?"—in a silky voice.

"I don't know much about law, except to keep the hell away from it. But sup-

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pose all of us trooped into court. What could they do? They couldn't arrest all of us. They couldn't pin it on Cherry. There's eight of us, all alike, even our fingerprints alike. They'd be sad. Their only case is identification and fingerprints; they think that points to one person. If there are seven others the evidence fits equally well, they can't do anything but throw up their hands, say please, whoever did it, don't do it again, and tell us to go home."

XIII

CHOLWELL'S face was a mask carved in yellow wax. He said slowly, "What you say is perfectly true. . . But it's impossible." His voice rose into a snarl. "I told you we can't stand publicity. If we carried out a stunt like that, we'd be known across all space. Angel City would be over-run with journalists, busy-bodies, investigators. The great scheme would be—out of the question."

"By 'great scheme'," asked Jean politely, "you mean the project of making us all mothers?"

"Of course. Naturally. The great scheme."

"Even if it means sacrificing Cherry? Her life?"

Cholwell looked pained. "You express it in unpleasant terms. I don't like it in the slightest degree. It means seven instead of eight. . . But sometimes we are forced to be brave and bear up under setbacks. This is one of those times."

Jean looked at him with glowing eyes. "Cholwell," she whispered. She was unable to continue. Finally she said, "Sooner or later—"

The closet door banged open.

A harsh voice said, "Well, I've heard all I can stand. More'n enough."

Out from the closet marched Mollie Salomon, and behind her the tall yellow-faced woman Svenska.

Magic, a miracle, was Jean's first startled supposition; how else to explain two big women in a broom closet? Cholwell sat like an elegantly dressed statue, his face a brown study. Jean relaxed her breath. Conceivably they had squeezed themselves close; the air, she thought wryly, must have been rich and thick.

Mollie took three swift steps forward, put her hands on her hips, thrust her round white face forward. "You nasty thing, now I know what went on. . . ."

Cholwell rose to his feet, backed away, quick and yellow as a tortoise-shell cat. "You've no right here, you'd better get out!"

Everything happened at once—a myriad bedlam jangle of sound, emotion, contorted faces. Farcical, grotesque, terrible—Jean sat back, unknowing whether to laugh madly or run.

Svenska cried in a voice guttural with passion, "You ruined me, you pig—"

"Rare puzzlement," snarled Mollie, "and all the time it was your fooling and fiddling!"

"—I beat my head, I cry, I think my husband is right, I am no good, I am—"

Cholwell held up his hands. "Ladies, ladies—"

"I'll 'ladies' you." Mollie snatched a broom from the closet, began whacking Cholwell with the flat of it. He seized hold, tried to tear it away; he and Mollie capered and wrestled across the floor. Svenska stepped in, flung long sinewy arms around his neck, squatted; Cholwell stumbled over backwards. They both sprawled to the floor. Mollie plied the broom.

Cholwell gained his feet, rushed to the desk, came up with Jean's dart-box. His hair fell lank, his mouth hung open, and he panted heavily. Deliberately he raised the box. Jean slid down in her seat, kicked out at his arm. The dart exploded in the door-frame with a dry clacking sound.

Svenska flung herself on him, Mollie hit his arm with the broom. The dart-box fell to the floor; Jean picked it up.

Mollie threatened him with her broom. "You should be ashamed of yourself for what you did!"

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SVENSKA reached out, gave his shoulder a shake. He stood limp, unresisting.

"What you gonna do about it?" Svenska cried.

"Do about what?"

"My husband."

"I've never even seen him."

"No. You never seen him," she mimicked in elaborate scorn. "No. But me—he comes, he looks at me. Big; seven, eight months, that's me. He calls me no good woman, and so—he goes. Off to Puskolith, and I never get no more husband. That's eighteen year."

Jean said mischievously, "You should make Cholwell marry you."

Svenska considered Cholwell a minute, came to a decision. "Pah, little shrimp like him is no good."

Mollie said, "And he was just getting set to try out his nasty tricks again; I knew he was up to no good soon as I saw him." She turned a look at Jean. "Whether you're my girl or not, I didn't want no nasty Cholwell fooling with you, I knew that was what he was countin' on, so I got ol' Pop to run me up in his float, and it's a good thing too, I see now; I come just in time."

"Yes," said Jean. "I'm glad you came." She released a deep breath. "I'm glad you came."

Cholwell was gathering his wits, arranging his dignity around him like a tattered garment. He seated himself at his desk, moved some papers back and forth with trembling fingers. "You've—you've got no right intruding in here," he said in feeble indignation.

Mollie made a contemptuous blowing sound. "I go where I please, and don't give me no lip, or I'll use this broom on you again, which I got half a mind to anyway, thinking of how you kept me out here after my time, and all for your nasty experiments."

Cholwell turned venomously on Svenska. "You let her in, and I've kept you here and given you a good home all these years—"

"Yah! And working my fingers to the bone, keeping you and them girls up; it's been no bed of roses. . . And now we do different. You work for me now."

"You're a crazy woman," snapped Cholwell. "Now get out—both of you, before I call the police." He reached out to the telescreen.

"Here now!" barked Mollie. "Careful there, Cholwell!" She flourished the broom. "Now I'll tell you what I want; you've brought misery on me, and I want damages. Yes, sir," she nodded placidly, "damages. And if I don't get them, I'm gonna take 'em out of your hide with this broom."

"Ridiculous," said Cholwell weakly.

"I'll show you what's ridiculous. I want my rights."

Jean said archly, "I think this old place would make a good chicken ranch. Cholwell thinks so too. You could put chickens in here and Cholwell could work for you . . . Cholwell told me there'd be money in it."

Svenska looked at Mollie skeptically. Mollie said to Cholwell, "Is that right? What she said?"

Cholwell moved uneasily in his seat. "Too cold and windy for chickens."

"Pah," said Svenska. "Nice and warm. Right in the sun pocket."

"That's what Cholwell told me," said Jean.

Cholwell turned a passionate face at her. "Shut up! You've brought me the devil's own luck."

Jean rose to her feet. "If I can run that old air-wagon, I'm leaving." She nodded to Mollie. "Thanks for coming out after me. I wish you luck with your chicken-ranch idea."

She stepped out into the corridor, leaving heavy silence behind her.

She hesitated a moment, then turned down the corridor toward the library. She felt light, energetic, and ran most of the way. At the doorway she hesitated again.

"Oh hell," said Jean. "After all—they're me."

She flung open the door.

Six girls turned, looked at her curi-

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ously. "Well? What did old Cholwell want?"

Jean looked around from face to face with the smile that showed her sharp little teeth.

"Old Cholwell is going into the chicken business with Svenska." She laughed. "Silly old rooster."

There was silence in the room, a kind of breathlessness.

"Now," said Jean, "we're all leaving. First thing is Cherry. She's in trouble. She let Cholwell make a cat's-paw out of her, now she's in trouble. That's a good lesson. Never be somebody's cat's-paw against your sister. But we won't be vindictive. We'll all march into the courthouse." She laughed. "It'll be fun. . . After that—we'll go back to Earth. I've got lots of money. I had to work like hell for it—but I guess there's no reason for me to be a pig." She looked around the circle of faces. It was like seeing herself in a multiple mirror. "After all—we're really the same person. It's a strange feeling. . ."

XIV

MYCROFT'S secretary and receptionist looked up with a sudden tightening of the mouth. "Hello, Ruth," said Jean. "Is Mr. Mycroft in?"

Ruth said in a cool voice, "We'd prefer that you call in ahead for an appointment. It gives us a better chance to organize and arrange our work." She shot Jean a look under her eyelids. . . Undeniably vital and pretty. But why did Mycroft go to pieces every time he looked at her?

Jean said, "We just arrived in town this morning. On the *Great Winter Star*. We haven't had time to call in."

"*We?*" asked Ruth

Jean nodded. "There's eight of us." She giggled. "We'll send old Mycroft to his grave early." She looked back into the corridor. "Come on in, group."

Ruth slumped back into her chair. Jean smiled sympathetically, crossed the room, opened the door into Mycroft's office. "Hello, Mr. Mycroft."

"Jean!" said Mycroft. "You're back. . . . Did you—" his voice faltered. "Which one is Jean? I don't seem able to—"

"I'm Jean," she said cheerfully. "You'll get used to us. If there's ever any confusion, look at our wrists. We're all stencilled."

"But—"

"They're my sisters. You're guardian to octuplets."

"I'm—astounded," breathed Mycroft, "to put it mildly. . . It's miraculous. . . Am I to understand that you found your parents?"

"Well—yes and no. Mostly no. To tell you the truth, it more or less slipped my mind in the excitement."

Mycroft looked from face to face. "Are you sure it isn't a trick? Mirrors?"

"No mirrors," Jean assured him. "We're all flesh and blood, very troublesome."

"But the resemblance!"

Jean sighed. "It's a long story. I'm afraid your old friend Cholwell doesn't appear in a very favorable light."

Mycroft smiled faintly. "I'm under no illusions about Cholwell. He was resident physician out at the Codiron Women's Home when I was director. I know him very well, but I wouldn't call him a friend. . . What's the matter?"

Jean said tremulously, "You were director at the Rehabilitation Home?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Just a minute. Let me think."

A moment later: "And Ruth has been with you a long time. . . How long?"

"Almost twenty years. . . Why?"

"Was she on Codiron?"

"Yes. . . What's this all about?" Mycroft's voice became sharper. "What's the mystery?"

Jean said, "No mystery. No mystery at all."

She turned, looked around the room into the faces of her sisters. All eight burst into laughter.

In the reception room Ruth bent savagely over her work. Poor Mycroft.

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The Quaker LADY and the JELPH

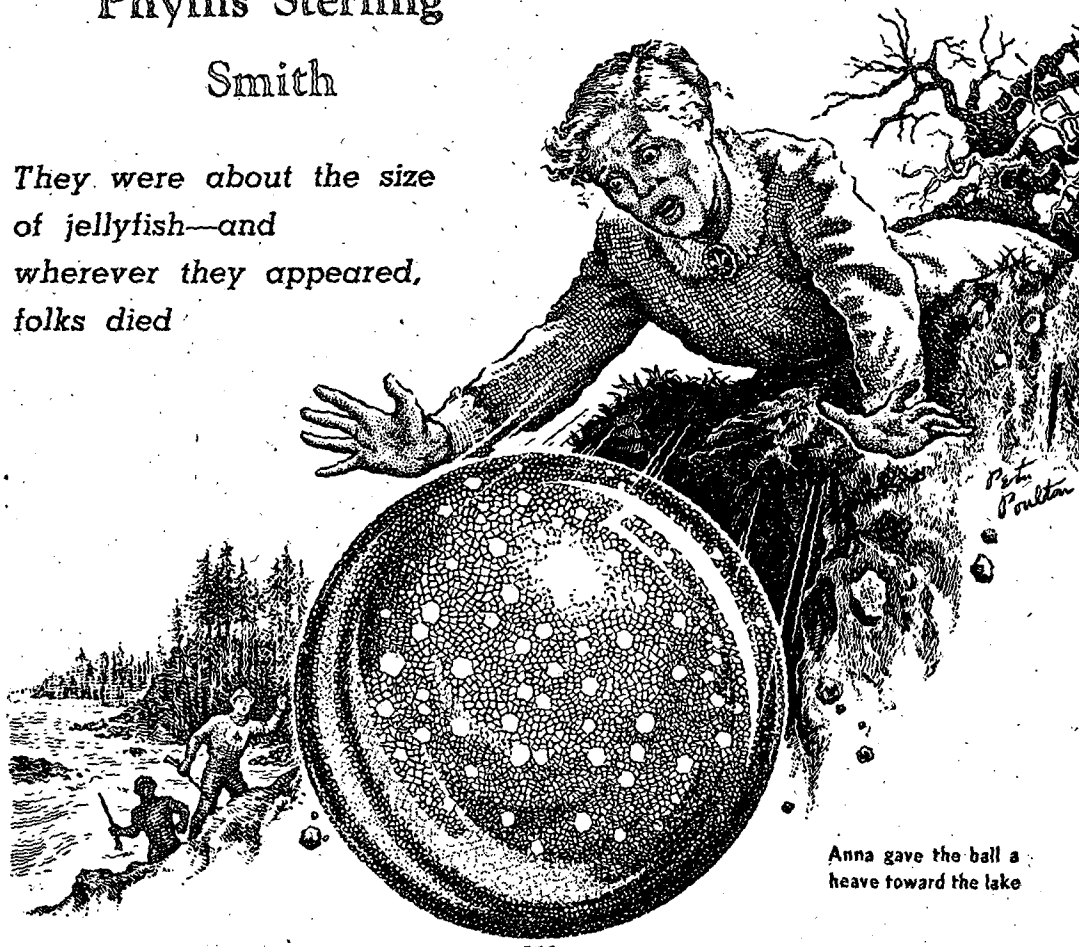
By Phyllis Sterling Smith

They were about the size of jellyfish—and wherever they appeared, folks died

ANNA knew what it was, of course, as soon as she saw it. The iridescent metal bubble sat lightly upon the pine needles, and the sunlight flickering through the tall trees sent rainbows of color pulsating across its surface. The pictures that she had seen in the newspaper had shown the gorgeous color, but not the movement. It was more beautiful than she had imagined.

Perhaps that is why she felt no fear.

A chipmunk peered around the massive trunk of a redwood tree, then skittered, unafraid, to a place mere inches from the bright ball. Its tail flicked with nervous jerks, but its wary eyes were



Anna gave the ball a heave toward the lake

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fixed on Anna, not the thing near it.

"If thee's not afraid of it," Anna said aloud, "it would not look well for an old lady to turn and run."

Her heart began to beat with an excitement that was not unpleasant. She stumped toward the thing. The chipmunk raced halfway up the tree trunk, then stopped and chattered at her angrily. With only a slight hesitation, she stooped and touched the surface of the small globe. It was cold. She pulled her finger hastily away and stepped back to examine it. It was only three feet or so in diameter, and its surface appeared unbroken. She knew it could open, however. Anna had read the newspaper reports of the other three balls and the "invaders from outer space" that they had contained.

Even as she watched it, a split appeared down one side of the globe, and its occupant began to ooze out, the jelly-like material of its body shot with tiny blue veins.

Involuntarily Anna stepped back again . . . was it really poisonous? The other invaders, dubbed "Jelph" because of their superficial resemblance to jellyfish, had been destroyed "before they could prove their lethal intent," as the papers said. But still men had died in the vicinity of their landings!

Anna felt a shock of distaste as the jelly-like body emerged to its full size of about a foot in diameter. It looked alien and out of place among the tall trees.

"It's one of God's creatures," she reminded herself firmly. "And if it came from way out yonder in the stars, it's no doubt an intelligent one. Likely brighter than we are, who have never been farther than the moon for all our trying."

A slight wind whispered through the pine trees, and a needle drifted onto the surface of the Jelph. A wave swept across the jelly and pushed the needle off with what seemed an impatient gesture. Anna shuddered involuntarily.

"If it is intelligent, no doubt it has senses, too," she thought. "Although I see nothing to serve for eyes or ears."

"Hello," she ventured, feeling somewhat foolish. "If thee can understand me, perhaps thee can make a sign."

AT FIRST it appeared that nothing would happen. Then the small creature changed its course and slowly undulated toward her feet. As it moved, a small tentacle extruded itself menacingly in front of it. Anna looked at it unwaveringly, although she was aware that her knees beneath her dark skirt were shaking in a most unladylike manner.

"It would serve me right," she thought, "if the thing were to sting me dead, right now. I'm a stubborn old woman who has not the sense to believe what the experts say."

The Jelph stopped at her feet and waved its tentacle at her in what seemed an invitation to a handshake.

"I wouldn't like to appear unmannerly," thought Anna. She swallowed noisily and forced her hand downward to meet the sticky limb.

Instead of grasping her hand, however, the end of the tentacle uncurled like a tendril, revealing a stone that Anna took to be a large opal.

"How pretty!" she gasped. "For me?" The Jelph continued to wave its tentacle as though offering her the gem. She took it gingerly between her fingers.

Though the stone was only the size of a pebble, it seemed to Anna that she held a thousand rainbows.

"Thank you!" she said politely. It seemed to her an inadequate remark, but the Jelph appeared satisfied. The arm was sluggishly withdrawn back into the main mass of its body. They stood there contemplating each other, the translucent Jelph and the tall old lady with the braids of gray hair coiled on top of her head. The shafts of sunlight through the fragrant trees flickered over them both impartially.

It was the sound of her grand-children by the lake that recalled to Anna the danger to the Jelph if anyone else were to come this way. Their calls to

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one another as they ran to the beach floated up clearly through the trees, and the sound of splashing as they reached the lake shore.

It was imperative that Anna be able to speak to the Jelph, to warn it that its life was in danger. It still had not spoken. It made no other sign.

"If thee can understand what I say," Anna started . . . but the possibility seemed so remote that she paused, wondering whether to continue. Still, it had come through space to earth, had it not? Who knew what senses and knowledge it might possess? "If thee can understand what I say to thee, raise TWO arms."

Unbelievably, two small lumps appeared on the amoeba-like form and grew upward into slender limbs.

"Good, good!" cried Anna. "Friend, your life is in danger. I had not thought that to warn thee would be so easy! I am your friend, and I would give thee help. They say that we are to kill thee, that thee's poisonous. The others, the ones that came before—" Anna stopped. How could she tell it that its brothers had been dissolved in acid lest their poison spread? "The danger is very great," she concluded lamely.

But of course the Jelph could not answer her. "To say 'yes,' thee might raise three arms, or two if thee means 'no,'" she suggested. "Knowing your danger, would thee like to leave now before the others find thee?"

Two arms.

"Have thee come for a purpose?"

Three arms.

"Is it a peaceful one?"

Three arms.

Anna nodded with satisfaction. "I thought as much, now the thing to do is to find a safe hiding place for thee and for your—conveyance."

SOME centuries before, a forest fire had hollowed out the centers of many of the large redwoods. Whole pine forests had grown to majestic heights since then, the sap had continued to rise in the live outer layers of the redwoods, and they, too had grown. The hollow centers remained, however, and provided homes for the woods animals, or magic playhouses for small vacationing children.

The tree in which Anna hid the metal globe was one in which she herself had played as a child.

The Jelph settled comfortably in a corner of the cavern-like hollow.

"Will thee be comfortable 'til I can return?" asked Anna.

Three arms.

"I will go to the cabin to warn my family of thy coming. It will not be the first time that this family has sheltered a fugitive!"

As she hurried down the path toward the cabins, her emotions were a confused mixture of worry—for the Jelph —, excitement, and—yes—satisfaction.

She had been disappointed by the trip to the mountains this morning. She remembered too well the old days of gasoline-powered automobiles, when the trip had taken hours instead of minutes, when they had had to worm their way up the side of the mountain on narrow six-lane highways. But they had seen things in those days! They had moved through deep forests, and green little mountain meadows with the streams meandering through them, and had looked down on panoramas of valleys and rivers. Now, in the modern autoplane in which she had accompanied her sons and their families to the mountain cabin, the trip was nothing but the rapid sweep of the earth far below. The swish of the takeoff was followed in a few minutes by arrival at the skyport.

Anna had felt cheated.

The finding of the Jelph made her feel unaccountably better.

"It's a good thing thee was found by Anna Kemp," she thought, impatiently pushing aside the branches across the path as she hurried to the cabin. "The Kemps were never ones to let a friendly, well-intentioned creature be slaughtered, for all he looks as though he were

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something dredged up from the deep sea bottom!"

She avoided the section of path which skirted the lake edge. She wanted no questions from the grand-children yet, not until she had spoken to their elders and their plans had been laid. She could see the youngsters through the trees, though, their brown bodies set off by glistening water and brief metallic swim suits. They were all engaged in some noisy game except for Annsy, her namesake, who, as usual, was sunning herself on a log a bit apart from the others.

Fortunately the "children" were all in the cabin. Robin, the lawyer son, whistled as he sorted over a collection of trout flies. Red-headed John, the moon-pilot, and George, the youngest son and a doctor by profession, were listening intently to the latest newscast, while their wives bustled about in the kitchen sorting the supplies they had brought for their vacation.

The men turned with surprise as Anna panted into the room.

"I've news for thee," she began briskly, but George suddenly leaned closer to the radio with a startled exclamation, and, turning up the volume, silenced Anna with an impatient gesture.

The voice of the announcer had quickened with excitement as he said, "A bulletin has just come to us from the Lake Alpine region in the Sierras, near Ebbet Pass. Several residents have reported seeing a round metal balloon-like object bobbing about near the sky-port. This is interpreted by authorities of the world government as being another invasion attempt by the Jelph, whose previous attempts to land in San Francisco, on the Persian coast, and in Nome, Alaska, have resulted in the mysterious deaths of twenty-three world citizens in those vicinities, even though the Jelph and their craft were completely destroyed by the federal marshals. It is reported that a detachment of federal marshals is being immediately dispatched to the mountain resort town to apprehend and dispose of the latest Jelph invader. The time of its landing is estimated to have been approximately three hours ago. Residents of the area are warned to be on the lookout for—"

Anna snapped the radio off. "Fiddlesticks!" she said. "It's no more dangerous than thee and me! We'll have to make plans to hide it better!"

Three pairs of startled eyes swung to Anna.

THE room was suddenly so quiet that Anna's breathing sounded as loud as a storm on the mountain. She looked around at the gaping mouths of her sons.

"Thee'd best close your mouths before some insect makes landing fields of them," she suggested tartly. "And now we must get to business. The poor thing is not well enough hid in that hollow tree, especially since they will be searching—"

"*What thing?*" demanded Robin, who, being a lawyer, was the first to catch his breath.

"The Jelph, of course. What did thee think I—?"

George groaned, and his voice trembled as he asked, "Mother, are you feeling all right? I know the altitude might . . . at your age . . . and out in the hot sun. . . ."

"George Kemp! I'm no more addled than thee are! A good deal less, judging from your present attitude," said Anna. "The Jelph is a sight more bright than thee are at catching on to things."

"You've really seen it?" John's voice was horror-stricken. "We must report it immediately! Where did you sight it?"

"Sight it? I've talked to it. I've hidden it safely for now, but we'll have to think of a better place . . . I talked to it, but it can't talk to me yet," Anna added scrupulously.

"Mother, you can't know what you've done!" said George.

His anguished voice brought the three wives hurrying from the kitchen. He turned to them with a helpless gesture. "She's hidden the Jelph!" he explained heatedly.

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"But the children!" cried Mary, his wife. "They're down by the lake! Call them up quickly!" She rushed toward the window.

"Enough of this!" snapped Anna. "You are a disgrace to your heritage! Did my great grandfather hesitate to hide escaping slaves back in the nineteenth century? You've heard a thousand times how his Pennsylvania farm was a station on the underground railroad! Didn't I myself serve a dull and unpleasant prison term back in the days of the great dictatorship for trying to hide a representative of the free world federation? You can surely stand a little risk when the life of an intelligent being like yourselves is at stake!"

"Listen, Mother," said George with exaggerated patience. "This thing is dangerous! I saw those people in San Francisco who died after the Jelph landed there! We couldn't find the reason, I'll admit, but the Jelph came, and then people died! Surely you wouldn't harbor a thing responsible for the deaths of innocent people—"

Anna sniffed. "Tried without jury! Convicted and executed! Do thee know that there had been no deaths in the smallpox epidemic in that Mexican village until I went down to nurse them? After that ten people died. Do thee think that I was responsible for those deaths? Besides, George, thee told me yourself that there have been several other recent deaths in the world where no Jelph have landed and that they were similar to the San Francisco cases."

She paused triumphantly. There was a moment's silence.

"But, Mother," said John urgently, "if they aren't spreading a poison, they may be plotting another type of destruction or conquest. What do you know of alien mentalities?"

"What do thee know, if it comes to that?" retorted Anna. "Has thee run across any creatures on the moon to test your psychology on? Thee are so sure of the Jelph's evil intent that it makes me wonder about your own motives in trying to build a rocket that will reach other worlds!"

"You've missed the point entirely!" said Robin crisply. "It isn't a matter for us to decide at all. It's out of our hands! The law says that the Jelph must be reported and destroyed. Now all we have to do is turn it over to the federal marshal. You can tell him where you've hidden it—"

ANNA'S eyes blazed. "The law, indeed!" she said in a trembling voice. "Since when has an unjust law taken precedence over the fate of a human—well, not human, perhaps, but intelligent—life?"

"Have you forgotten the children?" asked Mary. "Think what their friends would think if we associated with a slimy, loathsome thing like the Jelph? What if he is intelligent? Let him go back among his own kind where he belongs!"

"Yes," said George, "a thing like that could ruin their lives! They're so well adjusted now, so happy. Did you see how Buster gave up his own plans this afternoon without a murmur when the others wanted to go swimming? They're learning the right spirit." George put his hand on Anna's shoulder. "Let's not do anything that might ruin their lives!" he pleaded.

"And Annsy," Mary reminded them hesitantly. "I worry about her. She *isn't* well adjusted. She's always off by herself, alone. Doesn't seem to want to do the things the others are doing. Think what a shock like that would do to her!"

"Nonsense! Annsy's perfectly normal! Why, she's just like I was at her age. A mite dreamy, perhaps, and likes to be alone. What's wrong with that?"

There was a pregnant silence.

George's voice, when he answered, was deliberately kind, with a false cheerfulness that belied his worried look. "Things must have been hard on kids back in the fifties when the world was such an uncertain place. You couldn't

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have been expected to have a perfectly adjusted personality growing up in a time like that. We—well, we might be able to do something about it even now. Of course, you'd have to let us put you into a hospital for a while. A few months maybe."

"George Kemp, are thee suggesting that I put in an asylum?" demanded Anna. "It's plain to see that thee'll be no help to me today! I'll just handle this myself! I'll not ask thee to risk thy precious necks." Anna turned and swept majestically toward the door.

"Wait!" commanded Robin. "You can't do this to us! We have our own reputations to consider, too—"

"I guess my soul's still my own," said Anna with dignity. She picked up her plastic knitting bag from the chair next to the door and swept out.

As the door closed behind her, she could hear the excited babble of voices as they all began to talk at once. "I'll telephone—" she heard Robin say, and then she was out of hearing distance, stumbling with haste along the path through the pines.

Her heart was pounding. She couldn't have said exactly what caused it—indignation, the unaccustomed exercise at the high altitude, or the alarming conviction that what she heard in the distance was the wail of a police siren. Her hands clenched and unclenched, and she was surprised to find that she was still clutching the jewel the Jelph had given to her. She slipped it into the pocket of her apron.

THE Jelph was nervously undulating back and forth across the entrance to the tree when she returned. It paused expectantly as she approached. Anna was sure now that that was a siren that she was hearing, and, even as she listended, the sound grew to a shrieking crescendo. Probably the marshals had Robin's report by now and knew just where to look!

"I'm afraid I have failed thee," she said heavily, ducking into the narrow cleft of the tree. "Myself, too, perhaps." She sighed.

"They are looking for thee now. My children—" Anna drew a trembling breath. "They are a bunch of spineless—" Anna paused tactfully, hoping the adjective had not hurt the creature's feelings. "Thee had best go, now. Whatever your intentions, it is too late to carry them out. I brought this knitting bag, thinking to hide thee in it, but they know I am on your side. It would not be safe. Go! Now! While there's time!" she urged.

Two arms fairly shot into the air and quivered there.

"If thee must stay on earth, at least take your flying ball and go to some other place! Do thee hear that? That is the police car drawing up to the cabin. Go! Oh, please go!"

The Jelph didn't even bother to draw in his two arms. They stayed erect and seemed to blush a faint pink with emotion.

"Is your mission important enough to risk your life for?" she demanded.

A third arm joined the other two.

"I don't know how to help thee, then." Anna glanced apprehensively toward the patch of sunlight at the entrance to the tree, half expecting to see the feet of their pursuers. She saw instead a pair of small bare brown feet, still turned in an attitude of frozen motion.

"Who's there?" she demanded sharply.

Annsy's face slowly appeared, brown eyes rapt with excitement. Her bare legs were scratched and bleeding, and the copper fabric ribbons that tipped her braids were torn, as though she had been plunging through patches of prickly gooseberry bushes.

"I saw you hurrying, so I followed," she said simply, staring with fascination at the Jelph.

"Is he good?" she asked.

"I don't really know," said Anna honestly. "Excuse me," she apologized to the Jelph, "I think it most likely that thee are good, and on that basis I will

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act. But I cannot tell the girl something that is based only on my own feelings—"

Annsy was looking back along the path. "We'd better do something, then, before they find him," she said matter-of-factly. "They looked for you first on the beach, but I think they're starting up the path."

"We!" Annsy expected to help! A wild hope leaped into Anna's mind, and a plan. But . . . would it be fair to involve the child?

"Thee knows that helping him is against the law, do thee not?" she asked rapidly. "Do thee want to do something of which your parents disapprove, that might put thee forever apart from your playmates?"

"But they'll kill him if they find him, won't they?" It was a rhetorical question, and an answer to Anna's doubts. She hesitated no longer. Lifting her knitting bag into the air, she let it fall with a thud.

"Notice that I dropped it," she told Annsy, as she grabbed it up again. "I would not like thee to tell a lie."

Anna scooped up the Jelph and slipped it unceremoniously into the bag. "Excuse me, friend, for my haste. Thee will be safe for a while in here." Then, handing the bag to Annsy: "Go back to the cabin and take this to your room. If anyone asks about it, say that Grandmother dropped it in the woods. Talk as though it were of no importance. They think me addled enough to do it! Go now! Hurry!"

Annsy stepped into the path, thrust her arm through the handle of the bag, and ambled down the path with great nonchalance.

"She'll do!" thought Anna with satisfaction.

SHE stooped and lifted the gleaming metal ball in which the Jelph had come, which, for all its bulk, was not a heavy burden. Holding it awkwardly in her two arms, she backed out of the tree and plunged into the gooseberry bushes that led down toward the shore. She could hear the voices of the men, not far from the cabin as yet.

Then she heard Annsy's cool little voice, and though the words were undistinguishable, she suspected that Annsy might manage to hold them off a few seconds longer. All Anna sought at the moment was the shelter of the rocky point that lay in the opposite direction from the cabin. Once she was beyond it, she would be out of sight of her pursuers, and their indecision as to what path she might have followed would win her a brief reprieve in which she could gain distance before revealing herself to them.

"I may be an old woman," she thought grimly, "but I'll lead them a merry chase."

Once behind the point of land, she turned away from the lake and started up a long rocky slope, in order to follow the backbone of the ridge. Up and up she scrambled, feet slipping occasionally on loose shale. She judged it would be easier going than the low route through brambly gooseberries, however.

It was hot work, and she was hampered by the bulky globe. She would have liked to clutch at the young pines that clung to the clefts in the rocks, but her hands were completely occupied with balancing the unwieldy thing. Her heart pounded from the unaccustomed exertion. A shout below her warned her that she had been seen.

For a brief moment she looked back down at the little knot of men who had just rounded the point. They looked small and black against the glitter of the lake, where the ripples were catching the sun of the late afternoon. They started up the ridge at a run.

Anna groaned. "These old legs can't outdistance them much longer," she thought. And when they caught her and found the ball empty—

She appraised the gully to her right and the ridge beyond it. It would be a steep climb down. She was not sure that she would be able to climb the other side. The far ridge, though, sloped

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sharply into the lake, with few outcroppings on its surface and no beach at the bottom.

"It's worth a try," she thought desperately. She half slid, half fell into the steep ravine. Bushes caught at her skirt, and she turned her ankle sharply when a rock slipped. The pain of it made her eyes blur with tears. "Just a little farther!" she thought.

But now she was faced with a climb that, while short, was almost sheer, offering only small hand and foot holds. To accomplish it with the Jelph's globe in her arms seemed nearly impossible. She pushed the globe up ahead of her, and by wedging it between her body and the bank, managed to free her hands at the expense of a clear view of her course. Her hands groped blindly beyond the big ball and found a narrow horizontal ledge. With a supreme effort, her feet kicking and sliding in their attempts to find footholds among the fragile flora that clung to the cliff, she pulled herself up until her knee could be wedged in a cleft of the warm rock. She paused dizzily. With slow and deliberate movement, she managed to stand. She could go no farther.

She held the globe in her hands and turned to face her pursuers.

THEY were close enough for her to see that Robin was among them. Her heart twisted with the feeling of failure. "My son," she thought, remembering him as a tiny baby, remembering the fierce protectiveness with which she had resolved to remake the world for his sake.

"Peace in our time, oh Lord," they had sung in those days. And they had accomplished it. Peace and universal brotherhood. Where, oh where, had she failed?

"I thought I had taught them tolerance," she reflected bitterly. Then, more thoughtfully: "But what is tolerance if there's nothing to be intolerant of? We made the world so good that they've only had to go along with the majority! Why dissent when the majority is generally right? They've had no chance to develop a backbone! And this 'adjustment' that we worry about in the children—what is it but the giving up of every conviction of their own to that of the group? Anna Kemp, thee's been a fool!"

Then she remembered Annsy, and her heart lifted.

They were right below her now. The voice of the leader came clearly through the still mountain air. "Will you come down peaceably, or must we come after you?" he called.

For answer, Anna half turned and gave the ball a mighty heave toward the lake. For a heartbreaking second it seemed that it might catch in the brush; then it slowly started down the slope toward the lake. Quickly it gathered speed, bounced and rolled, and bounced again. Anna watched it triumphantly. As it reached the point, a slight rise of ground sent it sailing through the air in a graceful arc. It plunged into the lake, disappeared briefly, then bobbed up twenty feet offshore.

"Now she's done it!" growled the marshal disgustedly. "We'll have to get a boat!" He leveled a gun at her. "Come down, Anna Kemp. You're under arrest."

She came down willingly, even lightheartedly.

"We'll have to go back to the cabin to phone for a boat from the lodge," said the leader. "Someone had better keep an eye on that thing to see that it doesn't fly away. . . ."

AT FIRST Anna thought that the silent ring of grand-children clustered around the door of the cabin, their faces unnaturally solemn, meant that the Jelph had been found. It wasn't 'til she entered the door that the real truth dawned.

Annsy lay quietly on the couch, George and Mary kneeling beside her. George's arm was around Mary. Annsy lay with eyes closed, brown legs curled slackly, pale in spite of her summer tan.

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"She's got it," said George hopelessly. "Just like the ones in San Francisco. She just—collapsed."

"Is she—?" Anna couldn't say the word.

"She's still alive," he answered quickly. "If there were only something we could do!"

"What have I done?" thought Anna wildly. For the first time her children saw her face crumple into lines of utter defeat. "Anna Kemp, thee fool, thee thought thee could read sincerity in the quiver of a jellyfish's arm. Your pride is killing your grandchild!"

The reproach in the bitter look that Mary gave her was no greater than that Anna directed upon herself.

"But the Jelph!" she thought. The little knitting bag was lying at the foot of the couch where Annsy must have dropped it. Anna pounced upon it angrily, and her hands were not gentle as she pulled forth the quivering mass of the little animal.

"My God!" said the marshal, panic in his voice. "It's right here in the room with us!" He raised his gun with an unsteady hand.

Anna stepped quickly between the gun and the Jelph. "Hang on to your patience," she hissed angrily at the marshal. "Can't thee see that the Jelph is our only hope?"

She turned fiercely toward the Jelph. "Have thee anything to do with this illness that has come to Annsy?" she demanded.

She gasped as the Jelph raised three arms.

"Did thee cause it?" she cried.

Two arms shot forth emphatically.

"Have thee the cure for it?" She held her breath.

Three arms, flushed pink with eagerness.

Anna groaned. "If thee could only talk! Can't thee tell me more?"

The others stood silently, hypnotized by the strange conversation they were witnessing.

Suddenly the Jelph began to move, as though an idea had occurred to him. He gathered himself back into a compact ball, extruded a tentacle in front, and advanced toward Anna in the manner of their first meeting. The tentacle uncurled at the end and revealed—nothing.

"The stone!" said Anna. "Thee gave it to me—" Could it be the cure? How would one use it? As a pill, perhaps?

"Should I put it in Annsy's mouth?" she asked slowly, trying to make her meaning perfectly clear.

Three arms.

Well, if George were to be believed, nothing could be lost by trying. She pulled the opal from her pocket and wiped it on the corner of her apron.

George moved aside to let her lean over Annsy.

"Annsy, can thee hear me? I have something here to make thee well. Just open your mouth a bit."

Annsy's eyes opened slightly, and she opened her mouth trustingly.

Anna dropped the opal in. Annsy's face suddenly contorted with fright, and she spit the stone out convulsively. "He's thinking at me," she managed to murmur in a hoarse whisper.

"Thinking at thee," repeated Anna confusedly. With a sudden cry of comprehension she snatched up the radiant stone and put it in her own mouth. Immediately her mind was flooded with an avalanche of images and ideas. She turned to the others excitedly.

"A fought wefever," she explained. Almost immediately the idea came that her ear would do as well as her mouth for the stone. She transferred it.

"A thought receiver," she repeated with dignity.

The images crowded at her urgently.

"He's come because we're all infected with a fatal illness. He knows the cure," she interpreted for the others. Someone gasped.

"The earth passed through some sort of cloud in space, he says, and a type of poison—I think it's a poison—was deposited here. They detected it and sent doctors. He's some sort of doctor him-

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self. They went to the areas where the first outbreaks were expected—" Anna glanced reproachfully at George—"and they were exterminated. He'd like to talk to thee, now, George, since thee are a doctor, He'll tell thee what to do for Annsy."

She handed the stone to George. George thrust it into his ear. Anna almost laughed at the incredulous look on his face. "Get pencils and paper!" he shouted. "This is complicated."

There was a frenzied hunt for these items. Then George began dictating a steady stream of information, interspersed only with an occasional question to the Jelph.

ANNA sank into a chair and closed her eyes. The matter was out of her hands. She was old and she was weary. She may have dozed a bit. Anyway, she was only dimly aware of the flurry of activity, the compounding of the prescription for the antidote to the poison, the telephoning to the outer world of the Jelph's warning and its remedy.

Once she opened her eyes to look at the Jelph sitting quietly and broadcasting its thoughts to the excited throng around it. It might not be the most handsome thing she had seen, but it was really a bit pretty, she thought. So crystal clear, with its little blue veins branching like trees.

She was awakened by a shout. "But he's got to catch his orbit!" someone said. She opened her eyes and saw a state trooper lumbering in the door with the Jelph's globe in his arms.

"Not in here, you fool," yelled John. "He has to take off out doors, and in the next few minutes, too, if he doesn't want to stay here for the next few hundred years!"

There was a rush of people to the door. The Jelph was momentarily deserted, the opal lying near it unused.

Anna picked it up and fitted it in her ear.

"Tell me, friend," she said, "did thee know when thee came what had happened to the other Jelph? Did thee know we would try to do the same to you?"

She listened solemnly to the answer, nodding her head occasionally.

The crowd rushed in again, and the Jelph was borne away to its ship. Anna didn't go out with them. She watched from the window as the little globe sailed slowly up over the trees, then faster and faster, until it was lost in the darkening sky. Stars were beginning to twinkle here and there. Anna looked at them thoughtfully.

A crowd was gathering on the road. She could see Robin talking importantly to a man who was probably a reporter.

After a while, she went into the kitchen where Mary was beginning to prepare supper.

"Have thee a safety pin and some glue?" Anna asked.

Clumsily she contrived a sort of brooch by gluing the opal to the pin. She fastened it to the collar of her dress.

"But, Mother, you never wear jewelry," objected Mary with a little laugh.

"This was given to me by a very brave man," said Anna.

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Is a rose, a rose, a rose on Mars?

Sort of Like A FLOWER

By

JEROME BIXBY

THE SUN had been setting over the purple gray of those low hills to the "west"—a far, squat disc of lonely gold. And the flash, like the spitting of a match, had seemed to leap from that sinking sun, to jag out like a prominence. In reality, it had been some ninety million miles closer. Not a prominence, but Earth—blowing up.

Earth had been dead for a week now. Annixter thought some about it and all its people, but not as much as before. There's something about utter, idiotic self-annihilation that doesn't lend itself to retrospective searchings. Cancer, cut out. As if it had never existed at all, thought Annixter.

Mike came in from the garden. She was ruddy from the Mars evening cool; her blue eyes shone as she smiled at him.

"Come on and see, Harry!" She took Annixter's hand and led him out of their hut to the garden. "Look! Look there—those string bean things are really coming up!"

They were. Like upthrust knife-blades, with little budding pods ranging alternately along the fuzzy stalks. But not green beans, thought Annixter. There aren't any more green beans.

"And the eggplants—" Mike went on. She beckoned her man to a bending position, from which he studied the plump purple ovoids. Not eggplants. Something else now—coming up from strange soil. Something nameless, by Mars, out of eggplant seeds.

MIKE led him happily on through the garden. Different kinds of vegetables, all resembling their Earthly antecedents, but each no longer of a strain. Bastardized by Mars' alien chemistry, made new in shape and color and odor by the new world. How they tasted, only Peterson knew—the biologist had been picking and fussing around recently, gathering specimens for analysis, imploring that no one touch the stuff until he reported on it.

The peas were pink. Annixter turned away.

Mike saw the queer look on his face, and her hand went to his arm. "I know . . . Mars changes things. But we'll get used to it, Harry. At least, *we're* the same. Even if our great-grandchildren have two heads or whatever, they'll be

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human beings inside, just like us, and that's all that counts. So Earth isn't really gone—"

Annixter shook his head slowly. "I wonder, hon. I . . . when that stuff finally begins to *look* good to us—if we like the taste—all our criteria—" He stopped, thinking.

Mike smiled puzzledly, squeezing his arm.

"Hiya, Anny!"

It was Rupert, the Iowan, leaning over the fence, sucking at a long sliver of wood. My God, thought Annixter; if it weren't for that spaceship sitting over there, the tents and funny wood huts and that canal running off into the distance—I'd swear I was somewhere out in the Midwest.

"My garden's purtier'n yours," grinned Rupert. He waved a big hand behind him. Mike and Annixter moved to the fence to see. It wasn't a fence exactly, but part of the spaceship's central guide rail, disassembled and used here on the hill and in the valley below to bound the small plots of experimental agriculture—different fertilizers, different bacteria used in the water—to see what grew best where. Part of the spaceship's central guide rail — it wouldn't be needed any more as such. Not until someone rediscovered the atom.

Rupert's garden *was* prettier. Captain Dewell—Dewell, the famous philosopher—had made the plans, he'd built the ship. And when the H-War reached the Rockies, when he'd gathered his brood for the take-off from outside L. A. — "Bring along some trifles," he'd said at the last moment; "it'll make you feel better, and there's a little room to spare."

Blasting up, out over the Pacific and away from it. Forty people, heavy in their nets. Tons of supplies; microfilms of books, music; some machinery; all carefully amassed. And the trifles. Among the trifles: two cats, two dogs, Peterson's tropical fish, a canary, a pampered stowaway mouse, gadgets, every kind of little thing—whims, personal things. Some flower seeds. Rupert's.

"Look at that!" said Rupert with pride.

"That" was a rosebush, full flowered, its blood-red blossoms shaming the rust of the soil beneath them. It's an honest-to-God rosebush, thought Annixter, surprised. No change, no mutation or deformation. A plain, simple rosebush. He and Mike ducked under the chrome rail and knelt beside it.

"It's doing fine," Rupert was saying. "Take a look—only flowers on Mars. Damned planet doesn't seem to have any of its own."

"No," Annixter said, "it doesn't."

TENDERLY, he cupped a rose in his hand and inhaled its fragrance. A thorn touched his palm, not pricking it, just a sharp pressure that made the skin itch deep inside.

"There's one of those bat things again!" Mike pointed overhead. A black, spatulate-winged creature tacking back and forth in the upper air, its shrill, crowlike cry drifting down.

The sun—that same squat, red sun—was setting. The wind chilled and came faster, breaking path for evening. The rows of growing things, humanity's crops, rustled their strange leaves and twitched them at the reddening sky.

"It came up so fast," Rupert said. "It's frightening—just shot up! Planted it only a week ago. On the day that Earth . . . I planted the other flower seeds too. Only this one showed. The rest—" he looked regretfully at the little pile of withered brown shoots he had just dug up.

Mike stooped and tweaked a stem "May I, Rupert?"

"I—" Rupert moved a hand, dropped it— "well, yes—of course."

She snapped off the bloom and put it in her hair. Then she pirouetted and skipped while Annixter and Rupert stood by, smiling a little. Annixter's eyes, falling beyond her form for a mo

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ment, saw Dewell come out of the spaceship and turn up the hill toward the garden space.

Mike stopped suddenly, her head cocking to one side. "Say, Rupert—" she came back to where the two men stood — "let's pick all these roses and give one to each of the girls! There's just about enough to go around!"

"Oh, hell," Rupert stepped over to the bush. "Not on your life—my pride and joy!"

"But," Mike went on enthusiastically, "then, when they fade, we could all make like bees and have a thousand rosebushes! Don't forget, there're maybe no insects to pollenate your pride and joy!"

Rupert considered this, his long face sober. "Pollenate cut flowers, Mike? There's no future in it. But—well, I don't know—" he studied his knuckles—"after all, it *is* a perennial. I guess they'd get a kick out of it, wouldn't they?"

"They're women, Iowa. They're starved for a little something — like flowers to wear in their hair."

"Good idea!" applauded Dewell, who had reached them unnoticed. "And a lovely performance, my dear. I'm glad we managed to bring the charm of ballet to our new home." The breeze tossed his thick, white hair as he bent over the rosebush. "By all means, let us pick them!"

CAREFULLY, one by one, they removed the blossoms from their stems, putting them into Annixter's jacket which he shed for that purpose. There were twenty-six of them, all deeply colored and fragrant.

"Won't the girls be surprised!" Mike said. She caressed the velvety petals with the hollow of her palm. "Give you men something to think about besides exploring and weather analyses and—"

"Mike!" Annixter's cry was crisp and chill, his horrified gaze upon her hair . . . *"Your rose!"*

Her hand sped to the rose. It wasn't there. Some gray dust, a crumbling of black fibrous matter spilled down her cheek. Her eyes grew wide and round. "What—happened?"

"Freak," came Peterson's voice. "You shouldn't've picked them."

The lanky biologist hipped himself over the fence, came up to them trailing smoke from his pipe. "Something in the air—haven't pinned it down yet. Affects some of our plants, doesn't others. I'll lick it. Meantime, got to be careful. Got to make sure we have seeds before we start picking anything."

Rupert said, "Oh."

The other roses lost their red beauty. They turned to leprous gray and black; the stark veinwork of desiccation made them hideous.

Rupert turned his stricken gaze to the bush itself. Curling, flaking off, suddenly a tiny black-ashen snowfall at their feet.

"Ugh!" Mike shuddered and stepped back, brushing at her hair and cheek.

Annixter looked at Rupert. The Iowan was weeping, as a man weeps, with lips closed, eyes narrowed and bright.

"I'm sorry," Annixter said. He shook the stuff off his jacket and put it on.

"You couldn't know. But—" Rupert brushed his hand lightly over his cheeks — "no more flowers. You see, I love flowers . . . I loved flowers."

Dewell, his old face skilfully blank, turned slightly as Mike said something. She had stooped to the ground a little distance off, and now she held to their gaze the thing she had picked up — a small, ungainly cluster of black and purple berries on a thick, serrated stalk. It was ugly.

"Look," she said, "it's—sort of like a flower. Isn't it?" She didn't put it in her hair. It wouldn't have stayed, anyway. She stood there, biting her lip, shoving her toe at an "eggplant."

Dewell caught Annixter's eyes. They looked at each other for a moment, then at Rupert who stood looking at the thing Mike held, then at a point, empty

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in the sky, vaguely near the rim of the distant sun that sank behind Mars' horizon.

Annixter remembered: *"Even if our great-grandchildren have two heads or whatever, they'll be human beings inside, just like us, and that's all that counts"... "I wonder, hon... when that stuff finally begins to look good to us—all our criteria—"* and what he had left unsaid: *"Have we really saved Earthkind? Even inside? Mars is potent, and we are few. What will the centuries make of us? What will we think beautiful? Right? Wrong? Ugly? Won't it all... change too? I must ask Dewell about this."*

But now—suddenly, surely—Annixter knew. He knew, and felt sick. He closed his eyes.

"Flower!" came Rupert's bitter voice. "You call that horror a flower!"

The sun's red shoulder disappeared. The alien night began to darken the hill, the valley below, the encampment and silent spaceship.

"Not now, Rupert," Dewell said finally. "But it will be. It will be."

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

back? Sam says he's a wee bit juvenile. How can you say that about stories like *Calling Captain Future, The Return Of Captain Future, Children Of The Sun, and Earthmen No More?* Especially the latter. No, the Captain has been and can be as adult as he is made to be. Furthermore, with him back in the mag again, there is a better chance of seeing him between hard-covers.

So, if you want him back again, write to Sam, to me, or to both of us. If you want him you can't sit back. It might be your vote that swings it. We need you. So write as soon as you see this, huh? FUTURE FOREVER!!! — *Three Bridges, N. J.*

We're off to a good start, as usual. I appreciate the spirited and—oh, entirely voluntary of course—defense. Don't count on it for an immediate revival of Cap Future, though. What with our esteemed contemporary, LIFE, uttering the immortal words "there is a case for interplanetary saucers," science fiction becomes respectable overnight and leaves a lot of fans high and dry. There's no telling where the stuff will go now. We're still closed Saturdays, Hank.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS

by Pat Elewis

Dear Sam: If this letter should get published I can see the heading: "Ignorance Is Bliss." (Okay? —Ed.)

But am glad that Snell and Anderson will be battling it out via p[illegible]nal mail. Do you realize that in the first four paragraphs of an eleven paragraph letter, Snell had 6 nine-letter words, 10 ten-letter words, 1 eleven-letter word, 3 twelve-letter words, 11 thirteeen-letter words, 2 sixteen-letter words, 1 fourteen and 1 eighteen letter word. Beyond the fourth paragraph I could not go. I've worn my poor old Webster to a stub.

This ish (April) was good, especially the Pratt Fletcher. Am glad to see there will be a sequel. But I thought this ish could have had more variety. Almost missed it because I was looking for the identifying femme on the cover. I like anything but BEMS. Keep them inside: (Feminine view).

So. Windham, Maine.

You mean inside, like the letter column?

PASS THE NOVOCAINE

by L. W. Carpenter, D.D.S.

Dear Sir: Having been a reader of your magazine for a goodly number of years, I have rejoiced and suffered silently and alternately as the contents of your pages were good, bad, and indifferent. However, I am pleased to say that the good far outshines the bad; else why would I still be reading it?

The outstanding authors and capable editors that have graced the inside of your mag have given it the stature and prestige enjoyed by very few in the field.

However, the lead story in the April issue finally convinced me that I have been silent too long; so I take this opportunity to exercise a prerogative enjoyed by stf fans everywhere, and speak my mind about DOUBLE JEOPARDY in particular.

For many years I have been an admirer of the illustrious Fletcher Pratt. This gifted writer and historian has the rare quality of always producing *fresh* plots and *novel* situations. But DOUBLE JEOPARDY! Can it be that the venerable gentleman is losing his grip?

Being a member of The Healing Arts profession, I am sure the noted Mr. Pratt will forgive me if I criticize his story from the standpoint of one who has necessarily gained a knowledge of physiology and pharmacology.

Mr. Pratt's story is constructed around a mirac-

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ulous drug called *perizone*. Apparently this drug is a mould derivative similar to penicillin and aureomycin as far as its source is concerned, but there the similarity ends. Let us consider this incredible therapeutic agent.

Mr. Pratt endows his near-panacea with the following properties:

1. It cures leukemia. (not too far-fetched)
2. It cures *all other* blood diseases.
   Just think what is encompassed by the word "all"! Has Mr. Pratt ever taken the trouble to look up just how many diseases of the blood exist? Does he know, for example, that leukemia is a manifestation of a deficiency of the hemopoetic system, and that malaria is an infectious disease?
3. Cures several types of cancer. (possible)
4. Produces an extremely high degree of suggestibility without impairing the other mental faculties or producing sleep. (We'd sure like to have this one)

Mr. Pratt's *medical philosopher's stone* ignores countless physiological and pharmacological facts, but it all boils down to this: No drug could possibly have the properties with which the potent *perizone* is endowed.

Further, great pains are taken to explain why the government cannot keep track of the manufacture, dispensing, or use of the dangerous compound. Has Mr. Pratt never heard of the Harrison Narcotic Act? If not, I commend it to his attention, and he will see how exceedingly difficult it is for anyone to obtain narcotics from a legitimate dispenser. In DOUBLE JEOPARDY, not even the manufacturer is required to account for either the amount of the drug he is selling or the channels through which he markets it. The reason for this is a "personal privacy" law. The fallacy in this is obvious; as anything begins to affect the public health, it is no longer a private matter, but by its very nature, exposes itself to public control through laws. The manufacture of drugs presupposes the possession of a license, and the granting of a license is the permission of the government to exercise a *privilege*. There is a great deal of difference between a *privilege* and a *right*. A *privilege* can be revoked; a *right* cannot. Therefore, if the use of a privilege is inimical to the public interest, the government may revoke it. Such is the character of democratic government.

Also, it is stated that only especially licensed practicioners can administer, or supervise the administration of *perizone*. How little Mr. Pratt knows of doctors! Such a policy would be a professional slap-in-the-face to every doctor. Hell hath no fury like a Medical or Dental Society scorned! In short, it won't work.

Aside from the above points, DOUBLE JEOPARDY was an enjoyable and well-done story. I hope Mr. Pratt will spend more time and effort in research ere he invades the medical field again. —*L. W., 442 East 'E' Street, Elizabethton, Tenn.*

Don't you allow any poetic license, doc? If science fiction writers had to stick to established facts—established as of *today*, how could they get any stories written? The point in science fiction is that it is based upon an extension of today's facts—the author is permitted, nay encouraged, to invent things which are either new or improvements upon what we have today. No one can say with absolute certainty that a drug like perizone may not be discovered or synthesized tomorrow, any more than anyone could say a dozen years ago that we would never have an all-purpose antibiotic which would kill practically all germs in the bloodstream while not harming the host. Yet since the discovery of penicillin, we have had several others. And even if Mr. Pratt did take some liberties, why not?

CASE HISTORY

by Bill St. John

Dear SM: Just finished reading TWS for April. All I have to say is WOW. You almost made it to the top where OW MADGE, and AS is. If you keep going the way you have, you will hit the top any month now.

Now to go over the April ish: The cover is terrific. All the stories were good except THE PLANET MENDER. That yarn just didn't strike me right I guess. You had a lot of interesting letters in the letter column. I have an important question to ask you: Where was the editorial?

If this letter sees print: Will some of you fans drop me a line??? Please, no psychiatrists. When I had my other letter printed I received a letter from one and boy, was that embarrassing. Hello, Grady. (Got to keep my good old pen pal happy.) —*5 Ayers Pl., Oceanside, N. Y.*

All psychiatrists are hereby notified that we saw him first. What do you mean, "Where was the editorial?" We thought it commenced on page 6. But we could be wrong.

PULCHRITUDE DEPT.

by Marian Cox

Dear Sam: I haven't read the April issue of TWS yet; I haven't even finished the letter section, but when I read Evelyn Catoe's letter I reached for the typewriter and this is the result.

Evelyn, old girl, I'm with you one hundred percent. We need more men and fewer girls on the covers. The suggestion, of course, has been made before. (I made it in the September ish of STARTLING STORIES.) By the way, have you ever noticed that while the gals are always shown in only slightly more than nothing, the men are so bundled up you can hardly tell if they're men or BEM's. 'Taint fair.

I suppose we gals should be flattered by the obvious fact that men regard us as such indestructible creatures. According to them, we don't feel heat or cold and so don't need space suits. We must manufacture our own oxygen, or else we can exist without breathing at all. (Which is it, fellows?) They still call us the weaker sex, but I'm beginning to wonder.

My sincere thanks for the Finlay illos. Needless

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to say, I thoroughly enjoyed them. Why not surprise us Finlay fans by illustrating one issue entirely with his work?

Since I haven't read the rest of the issue I can't very well comment on it, but I do want to put in a plug for two of the best clubs in fandom. One is THE LITTLE MONSTERS OF AMERICA, and the other is the INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION CORRESPONDENCE CLUB. Both are swell clubs and we welcome all new members. Write to Lynn A. Hickman, 408 West Bell Street, Statesville, North Carolina, for information on both of them. You won't regret it.

Bob Farnham has a good suggestion. I think the covers would be greatly improved by reducing the amount of printing on them. How about it? — *Marian Cox, 1831 North Anthony Blvd., Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

You gals have the makings of a tremendous crusade in your lily-white hands. It is only conditioning which makes us consider the female form more shapely than the male. We could start quite a debate around the subject; RESOLVED, that the average knock-kneed, stoop-shouldered, hollow chested Man, is more beautiful than Marilyn Monroe. And if you advertised it long enough and hard enough, and showed males reclining on Beautyrest mattresses instead of Hollywood starlets, you'd get people to believe it. Maybe.

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

by Virginia Winchester

Dear Mr. Mines: Has any criterion been established to determine if a story is "Science Fiction"? What takes a story out of the pure fantasy category and gives it the title "science"? Science embraces many fields; physiology, archeology, history, crime detection etc. that this very diversity prompts this question.

Is the mere fact that the action of the story is set in the near or distant future (or past) sufficient for it to qualify? If so, any of the numerous historical novels would be eligible. I cannot picture true science fiction fans rushing to purchase a copy of TWS which featured PLYMOUTH ADVENTURE *or* GREEN DOLPHIN STREET. Yet many stories in science fiction magazines rely on nothing more than the fact that they are set in either some period of recorded history or an undivulged period known only to the author, if to him.

Then, does the same hold true for the future? Does pushing time ahead instead of back produce a different argument? Can we say that any speculation of the future must contain a rationalization of probabilities from known facts, which is the essence of science? This argument would allow any story as long as the time is set next month or later. This hardly seems valid.

Could a story be science fiction just because time stood still without any attempt at an explanation, and with no other reference to science? This might be construed as a dig at MOMENT WITHOUT TIME. True it involved (appropriate word) a formula and the sword of time slicing through water, but . . . Well, I was just asking.

How about space travel? Present day science has made the possibility of space travel so close that merely having the hero jump into a space ship and depart for worlds unknown would hardly seem sufficient. The mere use of a product of science should not in itself be a qualification. If it were, any story could qualify just because someone drove a car, spoke on a telephone or seasoned his food with iodized salt. If we continue along these lines we might arrive at the conclusion that nothing is science fiction (or that everything is). Of course there are some tales that obviously belong. My remarks apply more to the borderline cases, and there are many of them, which have made me wonder if they really belong in science fiction or in ARGOSY.

I like THE READER SPEAKS because (25 words or less) of the type of contribution you print in it. Too many magazines print endless lists of personal opinions, usually in terms of rather childish inanities, or descend to vitriolic diatribes involving personalities. Let us have more letters on an educated level, such as between Hal Clement and James Blish in your April issue. A nice, cold dispassionate analysis of given facts with no loss of blood or decorum. I think your own remarks and analyses should be enlarged. You have the experience and access to information, and we need an umpire. (Did you really expect a female to confine herself to 25 words?)

The ratings, I think, should fall under your shears, except for remarks of an analytical character which might be of interest to your readers . . . I know you need to have these listings in order to keep your finger on the pulse of your readers tastes, but most of them should stay in your office. Perhaps one of the reasons I do not waste time on ratings is that I am not a regular reader. I may buy three or four mags at one time, then go for three or four months before the next splurge. So usually I don't know the stories being rated. In any case, the opinion of another reader is not going to influence mine. I still (italics please) like space sagas and have no objection to BEMs if there is a reason for their being that way. After all, why should *all* intelligent life throughout the universe be humanoid? We are products of environment. I am inclined to be critical and consider myself lucky if an issue contains more than two yarns that I like. I do not consider robots (mechanical men) practical. Walking requires a highly sensitive reactive equilibrium mechanism. The stabilization mechanism for a machine would be too heavy and bulky to be practical, tracks would be more efficient and would no sink into soft ground as would feet. Incongruities seem to stand out noticeably. Fall FANTASTIC STORY had a reprint from 1932, BEYOND PLUTO, which was very good. On the whole enjoyed it. However the ease with which th Kananites were hypnotized by their own musica speech is hard to credit. An interesting gimmick but I would seriously doubt that a race so easil influenced would get very far, certainly as far a they did. Another point from the same story—i the Zongainians could produce such marvelou space ships and an atomic missile (in 1932) surel

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they would have developed something more accurate, and with greater range than hand throwing. Details like these could be improved without much trouble.

A few random thoughts to close. HUMOUR: One of the funniest stf I have read was Robert A. Heinlein's — AND HE BUILT A CROOKED HOUSE. SEX: Certainly: why not? I am in complete agreement with Evelyn Catoe. What men we do see are almost completely hidden in space suits. How about you fellows coming more out into the open? However let us not confuse nakedness and sex. Absence of clothing does not mean indecency per se. It is the mental approach that counts. Working for a doctor as I do, I've had plenty of opportunity to observe this at first hand. Incidently, my boss is an occasional stf reader. He told me of a story he started in 1931 or '32, called JEWEL FROM THE GREEN STAR in three parts. He enjoyed pts 1 & 2 but never did get pt. 3. Can anyone help me find this (all 3 parts)? — *Box 786, Grimsby, Ontario.*

If you weren't so far up in Canada, we'd think you'd been reading our mail. We have, in bitter and scathing accents, long decried the story which could just as easily have taken place in Passaic, New Jersey, as on Venus, yet masquerades under the guise of science fiction. Just as unpleasantly have we called attention to the fact that stf has progressed beyond the point where a mere trip in a space vessel is sufficiently novel and exciting to carry the story by itself. As to the difference between science fiction and fantasy—I doubt that I can give you a definition which would do more than confuse everybody. There is no agreement whatever. What one fan calls fantasy another labels science-fiction. One reader recently squawked about a preponderance of fantasy which he said we were running in SS, while in the same mail came another missive grumbling about too many stories being space operas. Maybe this is the charm of science fiction, that it is all things to all men. But let me try something of a definition.

To me, science as contrasted with fantasy means a story based upon accepted scientific theory or a reasonable extension thereof. This means if your characters are going to fly they should be careful to invent a machine which seems logical and which will carry them aloft. In a fantasy they would dispense with the machine, but would simply take off by themselves and fly like ba—birds. Fantasy does not limit the author's imagination by imposing any realistic or mechanical barriers. And while it does not imply a complete fairy tale in which magic is real and accepted, it requires only the sketchiest sort of "explanation" to excuse its magic by calling it science of a fantastically advanced sort.

Your suggestion that we cut story ratings from letters has been most influential. In fact we started by cutting the ratings out of your letter.

Evelyn Catoe and Marian Cox will be pleased with your support. I've already said enough on the subject to earn the usual respectful comments from fen. Come again.

LOST AND FOUND DEPT.

by L. Sprague de Camp

Dear Sam: Last September I was standing, with wife and elder offspring, before the entrance to the dining saloon of the S. S. Ryndam, enroute from Hoboken to Southampton, when I heard voices discussing science-fiction. There were four young people working away hard on the subject. I wandered over in time to hear one of them tell of some young woman writer who, it seemed, had had great recent success writing under a number of pseudonyms.

"Such as?" I said.

"Oh, I don't know," they said. "Maybe something like Lewis Padgett, or Sprague de Camp..."

That, of course, is one of those opportunities that doesn't come often. With ostentatious nonchalance I replied:

"Oh, no, that's me!"

"Huh?" they said. "What?" "You mean *you*..."

"Yes," said I smugly. "I'm de Camp."

Well, there ensued the usual expressions of incredulity and handshakes. Of one of these young people, George Warten, I saw quite a bit on the ship, and when we parted at Southampton I promised to invite him to a Hydra meeting when we both got back from Europe. But when the time came, I couldn't find the slip of paper on which I had written down his address. So if anybody knows George Warten, or if George himself reads this, will you please drop me a card with his correct address? It's somewhere in Queens, New York City. — *Wallingford, Penn.*

You're welcome. And no doubt George is reading this right now. Tws gets around.

NORTHERN CHILL

by Don Foster

Dear Ed, For corn sake why don't you guys make up your mind! You seem always to make a mistake in every issue of TWS and SS about coming stories.

In February 1952 SS on page 84 one of your features for March was PARADOX-PLANET by Roger Dee. When the March Ish arrived I looked through the contents page but no PARADOX-PLANET.

In the March issue on page 90 THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS by Kendal Foster Crossen was a feature for the April issue. So when the April ish hit the stands I was out of luck. (KFC is one of my favorites).

In February 1952 TWS MOMENT WITHOUT FEAR and PLUMBER'S FRIEND were

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both featured for the April ish but they both appeared under different names.

Now don't misunderstand me, please. I'm not picking your book to pieces. In fact I think it is one of the best on the stands. BUT, why the mistakes? I guess we all have to accept these things.

I liked most of the stories in the April Startling Stories except for THE LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR. I don't know why but I just can't stand Leigh Brackett. Her stories have no appeal to me. She has good writing style but that's about all.

If there are any fans selling out any issues of about 44, or around there would they please write me stating prices. — *3542 West Point Grey Road, Vancouver 8, B.C., Canada.*

Not all of these were mistakes, but some were and we throw ourselves upon the mercy of the court. No proof reader caught MOMENT WITHOUT TIME being advertised as MOMENT WITHOUT FEAR. And changing PLUMBER'S FRIEND to THE PLANET MENDER was a last minute decision which couldn't be helped for reasons too involved to go into here. As for the other deals, sometimes a story is scheduled and gets crowded out when novels or novelets run startlingly long. But hang on, you've already had HOUR OF THE MORTALS, and PARADOX PLANET will likely show up in October SS, but I'm making no promises, see? A kudo to you for your observation, nobody else seems to have spotted the boners, or had the bad taste to mention them.

IT GETS HARTER AND HARTER

by Richard Harter

Dear Coal Mines:

Chapter I

You asked me if I never wrote a blurb. I did not. When I get that low I am going to shoot myself. I have never written one of those insults to the English language and the reader's intelligence and I never will. I admit a blurb has a hard job to do—it has to tell the reader something about the story, and more important, it has to interest him in the story. Usually it fails of both. The most common error of the blurb writer is to try to condense the story into one or two lines. Any story that this can be done to is not worth reading. Far more interesting is the editorial paragraph or two at the beginning of the story. I almost always turn to this for my opinion of the story and for the best in entertainment. For shame, to think that anyone would defend the Blurb.

(These editorial paragraphs we call blurbs too. And thanks for the compliment. — Ed.)

Chapter II

The enclosed three bucks is for a subscription starting with the June issue.

Why is it that the departments are the best thing in the mag—is that my personal opinion or are they naturally good, and if so, why?

(Happens to be our opinion too. — Ed.)

There were two good stories: THE PLANET MENDER and PUBLIC EYE. That is about par for TWS. The rest were good, but nothing sensational.

Why doesn't the plot of THE PROMISE die a natural death? It's old enough.

Michael Wigodsky flang the gauntlet. I'm with him 200 percent (lot of difference it makes, but I still am.) Weinbaum not only could have been an immortal of SF if he had lived but he wrote some of the best SF and it is still the best. Anyone who says different is wrong.

Blish said that Frank Scully's book was a hoax. I defy him or anyone else to prove it. Scully never said that the supposed spaceships had to come from Venus, but only that it was a possibility. I do not offer this as belief or disbelief, but simply as a disinterested spectator. The scientific mind accepts nothing as true or false until proved. Everything else is unproven and can be thought of as more or less probable. It's a nice thing to keep in mind.

Chapter III

Why doesn't someone form a SF book club? It should be profitable and I would think that there are a lot of SF readers who would like to join such a club. After all, there are about 5,000 rabid fan-atics and these, as Mr. Merwin said, are but a small portion of the SF audience. I write this with a purely personal interest—I'd like to get in on such a deal. If, in my incomparable ignorance, someone has done so, won't somebody please tell me about it?

You should have taken what you got. I'll give you no more flattery. — *Highmore, South Dakota.*

If we were looking for flattery do you think we'd print all these grumpy grunts from disgruntled gramps? An SF book club may come yet, but don't rush the growler. Meanwhile, Shasta, Gnome, Prime, Fantasy and some others do nothing but science fiction, so there's your club, to say nothing of all the big publishers who are buying in. Or is it the club discounts you're interested in? Well, maybe there's an idea for someone. We've got other troubles.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

by Pat M. Paul Kelly

Dear Sam: Thanks for printing my card. I was wondering if you would, knowing your so-called "free-thinking" bias.

The stories have been fairly good, but I must object to the increase in paganism and illogical mythology in some of the current stories, even though that is a back-handed acknowledgement of the existence of Supernatural beings. How about letting some Christian stories appear in TWS and SS like there used to be. Also, please get some authors who know their Celtic folklore better than the ones you currently have. The inclusion of Teutonic mythology with Celtic legends

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is quite a misnomer since the Celts are in no way related to the Teutons, being the only people to come from the West. Also, have them look up the difference between the various Celts—Gaelic, Brythonic, Hibernian, Latin, Baltic, Gaulic, Firboug, Melesian, etc., because they have been getting them mixed up.

Now a word to the following: NEAL CLARK REYNOLDS. A (something—can't read his writing—Ed.) to you for your support of my beef. I think since Our Lord came to save all mankind, Christians should be vocal and insistent on their beliefs.

HENRY MOSKOWITZ: You too, Brute? Let this be a call for all Capt. Future fans to get together. I would like to hear from all Future fans. How about reviving The Future Men or some similar organization? Let all let out with a howl and be counted. Maybe if enough of us can get together, Sam will have to bring Cap Future back (and Sam, tell Ed Hamilton that Capt. Future should not be spoiled by pessimistic pantheism and materialism. He wasn't when he started.) Let me hear from you, Henry and all you other Future fans. Now, Sam please print my address?—*2601 S. Figueroa St., Los Angeles 7, Cal.*

P. S. What happened to TLMA? I sent in my dues two months ago and have not heard from them. What goes?

First off, let me point out that a "free-thinking bias" is a contradiction in terms. A liberal thinker (which is the only kind of *thinker* there can be) has as little bias as he can manage. He is *open* to all ideas. Your trouble, Patrick, is that you want to have your cake and eat it too. You insist upon the existence of Supernatural Beings, but only *your* kind. Isn't that selfish? Why not let our poor authors have their mythological beings? Some of them are so charming—and they have the advantage that they can be kidded and satirized (as they usually are, though you seem to have missed this point) without anyone's taking offense. This is hardly true of the living religions. Also, aren't you being a little mean in ruling out all these charming legends? Your own Christian religion borrowed heavily from them.

Let us, in these columns keep in mind the fact that nobody wants to hurt anyone else, that we're all fond of each other and that we are supposed to have a scientific, open, dispassionate viewpoint and a willingness to discuss subjects without rancor. This includes Captain Future, who is already being organized by Henry Moskowitz, so you will no doubt hear from the sage of Three Bridges.

FIGHTING MAD

by V. B. Williams

Dear Editor Sam: A certain Hammond's letter was the last straw. If I don't let loose with an opinion or two now I'll end up on the couch of every psychiatrist from Maine to California.

Maybe I too am guilty of sophomorism. So be it, let the chips fall where they may.

First, is there a dearth of magazines that cater to the sex motive or the romantic angle? No, such periodicals crowd others off the stands. Would a person who dotes on romantic ghoulash appreciate having their trash interspersed with scientific facts and fancies? Think of some you know, Hammond and answer me honestly! If I go to the library and select a book on electronics, have I a beef if the atoms and electrons fail to "get hot?" Curses on your head, Hammond. If you pick up Webster, looking for the definition of a word and find recipes instead, should you be annoyed? When you want to find out about Life In Outer Mongolia, do you, Hammond, reach for the newest whodunit on your shelf?

Let me put it this way. SF has had a long pull up the road of popular appeal. It's beginning to make itself felt. It's best is challenging, exciting, thought provoking and well able to stand on its own merits without the frills and furbelows some would drown it in. If you, Hammond, and others of your ilk, you poor, pitiful earthman, entranced with the most elemental uses of mechanico-chemical-electro combination—phooey, tune out while I replace a blown gasket—want the Form Divine, well and good. Get your fill of police gazettes—I believe it is still tottering around. A burlesque show will be glad to take your money. Esquire is no slouch. Romance, true stories, untrue stories, confessions, obsessions—they're all there, just wheel yourself down to the nearest newsstand, Dave my boy. It's all there for the price of the coins clutched in your little hot hand.

But man, use your bean. SF has its own particular appeal and should remain what it is, an unadulterated challenge to the imagination of thinking or would-be thinking minds, a bright promise of the future to come, a spur to the frontiersmen of tomorrow, the beckoning light of challenge to man's ingenuity (came up for air—Ed.) skill and desire for other worlds, not to conquer but to know. Heights yet to be scaled, figuratively and literally. Sex is all around us but true adventure and achievement is always just one planet beyond us. So Hammy, about face, carry on, pip pip and outer space viruses to you, old boy.

I'm still snorting, blithering and fighting mad, mad! So there.

And that goes for Wilkie Connor too. — *2524-16th Ave. So. Minneapolis, Minn.*

Down, boy, down. Remember your blood pressure. Look, comparing an stf story with a touch of sex in it to a girlie mag, or a burlesque show isn't cricket, old boy. What Dave Hammond meant, and what we have said over and over is that we are not going out of our way to get sex in the stories or anything like it. If the author doesn't put it in it doesn't get in by any instructions from us. What we are after is more realism, better writing, better situations. If this involves sex (and that is likely to happen whenever boy and girl find themselves marooned on an asteroid) we are

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not backing away from it and pretending it isn't there—thass all. There's been entirely too much backing away and pretending things aren't there. And we'll admit there are plenty of red hot subjects we'll still have to back away from, but a lot of hitherto sacrosanct barriers and crumbling and we've got to make a start somewhere and we think this is progress—exactly the same kind of progress in the freedom of the mind that your planet hopping represents to you. You're separating them, we are insisting that they are all tied together. Hammond, are you there?

UNINHIBITED SNARLY

by Edward the Seibel

Dear Eddy-tear: I finally cranked up the courage to write to you, although I do not have in my possession any longer the reference material I desperately need to scribe this letter; namely, I no longer have in my grasp your April, 1952 issue of TWS. So you'll just have to show a bit of deference and understanding if I foul up anywhere in my letter, since even the infallible mind of a genius such as I can sometimes make a mistake or two.

Allow me to tell you what happened to that particular issue of TWS, but don't send me any replies through the mail after I tell you, because I'll be afraid to touch them for fear of my very life. It just so happens that I was carrying in my loving grasp that particular magazine when I started to pass the chemistry lab as I do every day when coming from the botany class—I was carrying the mag because I had spent my extra time in botany perusing its contents, which if I want to hurry in my reading takes me less than fifteen minutes. As I was saying, I was walking by the chem lab, commenting to myself that I should send you a letter of commendation for the wonderful cover on that issue, when a raucous creature hailed me from the doorway of the chem lab: "Hey, (censored), you still reading the Startling Stenches?" "Sure," I answer, walking over to him, "I got a strong constitution." I notice when I come up to him that there's a couple more future mad chemists inside. "Here, let me have it a minute," he says, and taking it from my hand tosses the mag into a pot of boiling water. I stand stupefied. "You remember what we did in high school chem? Well, you're going to get just as big a bang out of this zine," he continues, pouring all kinds of stuff in. What he said comes to me in a second: I lunge forward, but it's too late, even as I yell: "Hey, no—"

BoooOOOMMMM!

The magazine was blown to bits, most of the pieces sticking to the ceiling from being immersed in the goopy mixture. Some of the goop started dripping down from the ceiling, and the pieces of the mag that didn't stick to the ceiling were lying on the work benches or the equipment on the benches. Needless to say, everyone left in a hurry, before the instructor would return.

Commenting further on that cover, it was really good despite the fact that the artist's technique was somewhat rough. I seem to recall hearing of this Emsh before, but I can't quite place where it was. I hope you continue such wonderful covers as these; you certainly have my vote for their continuance. On that matter of the roughness of technique. I suspect that I'm the only one who notices it. I recall reading a story some years back where the protagonist was from a race whose brains had I.Q.'s of around 1400, and when he encountered a wench who lived in a 400 I.Q. environment that environment looked like the dabblings of a child.

Ye gods, when I read Plecher Fratt's story I thought of just one printable word: Puerile. If you must, just have mysery (sic) stories at least make them a little more interesting. I knew before I even reached the middle of that thing what was going to occur next, and I knew what the end would be. I don't like misery stories anyhow; in fact, at the age of eleven I stopped reading miserys since I found the author either gave away who was the murderer, or didn't give away anything so how could the hero find out what he mentioned when he exposed the treacherous, bloodthirsty villain? Sure, I'll agree they've a place in s-f when they're written with more facility, but I'll be roasted in hell before I read another one of them. Let those who enjoy such things read them instead.

Great Galaxy, I was all mad at you Sam, then I read *Moment Without Time* and stopped being mad at you. That was one of the best stories I've read for a long time—if it doesn't find a place in an anthology then all the anthologists are blind. I've never read a story that appealed so to the emotions; Rogers must be quite a writer, when they let him loose at a typewriter. I can see him now, his fingers poised over the keys, waiting for the first surge of inspiration, then a mad, chaotic flashing of fingers as it flows through him. Sheets flying to the floor, minute after minute. At last the masterpiece is done, and the master lies slumped over his typewriter, the inspiration down for posterity, and now his corporeal body lies in a languor of exhaustion. Attendants come in, carry him out and to bed for a well-deserved rest . . .

Sam, on the side, are you—? Whether tis true or not, and I suspect it is true, the *Foodlegger* was mighty, mighty funny. I enjoyed it next to *Moment Without Time*. Whereas MwM was an enjoyable pathos story, yours was tremendously enjoyable in a humorous vein. (Someone tell me how veins can be humorous—nor can I answer you as to what a fond, friendly snarl is. You shouldn't ask me such questions, it's embarrassing.)

The Planet Menders and *Counter Transference* were interesting too. *The Promise* came in after them. I spit in the *Public Eye*.

As for this fellow, Chanticleer Slycrock, I agree that the matter should be dropped. After all, what else does one do with excretia? I never heard of such a paradox as a fellow who denounces philosophy and yet has formulated one for himself.

Now, on to the subject of science in science-fiction. It appears to me this issue adequately proves that s-f authors should read science. (Incidentally Sam, in an issue of Startling you say they don't need to, and then in TWS you have science articles published. What a contradiction! Who's twisting your arm?) Even in the wildest imaginings of any author, they can't match the actual grandeur that is Jupiter. If I were writing s-f at present, I'd drool

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over the story material presented by the facts about Jupiter; countless stories are possible, and good ones from these facts alone. You probably remember the old tales about heroes landing on the Giant and about these heroes encountering Earth-like conditions—and that was just the trouble: a guy never felt he was out of this world in those old stories. They just weren't real enough. Would Hal Clement who sent you a letter this issue have been able to write *Iceworld* if he had known nothing of science? Would *Bridge* by another author, Blish by name who is doing your science articles have ever been written if he hadn't studied a bit of science? Would *Earthlight* by Clarke ever have been written?

By the way, Mr. Blish, you shouldn't have been so harsh on Tuning. The poor boy might become angry, and from corresponding with him I have learned that he dabbles in the blackest of arts—black magic! Suppose poor Sam, expecting to meet you for some appointment meets instead a gigantic toad with golden eyes, hopping forward to meet him, clutching your latest science article in one webbed hand? However, for a nominal amount I'll sell you a genuine charm guaranteed to ward off Tuning's magicking.

Tuning, you'll have heard this from me far before the time it's read by you in this mag. You know me anyhow, and how uninhibited I am, so calm your corpuscles after you've read this: Tuning and Bradbury if that is who he means should reflect a bit more deeply on the science issue—so they don't like what science is doing for/to the world, eh? Go back to the caves then, dammit! You'll find them mighty cold places without the kind of modern heat you're used to! And try rustling up a bit of grub—you're kinda hungry most of the time, aren't you? No canned food either, there's few methods you can use to preserve food. Want to go someplace? Walk 35 miles in one day, that's all you can do. Listen to music and relax? No radios. No entertainment at all. I'll part with one question: What is it specifically that scientists are doing that is so disreputable? If it's because of the armaments they've concocted along with the good things of life, well if you'll think about that too you'll see the perfection of armaments has made war undesirable and useless rather than the opposite. And anyhow, it isn't the scientists who say what should be done with the things they invent.—*Box 445, Olivehurst, Cal.*—

For a boy who spent only fifteen minutes over that copy of TWS, you sho' managed to imprint it upon your photographic brain. Even without the magazine you remembered stories, authors, letters and pictures. I can see that micro-film will have a poor future with you.

But to business. First, I am not Matheson. Nope. Did not write THE FOODLEGGER. Haven't started selling stories to myself. When I write I'll stick the competition with them, let them suffer. Yuk.

Didn't say authors needn't read science. On the contrary, I recommended it. What I said was that sometimes I wouldn't let splitting a scientific hassenpfeffer stand in the way of a good story.

Say, that toad with the golden eyes showed up yesterday. What do we do with him?

FLAGPOLE SITTERS AND STF FANS

by John Van Couvering

Dear Sam: It's been a good long while since I sat to write anything for a letter column. But while glancing through "THE READER SPEAKS" for old times' sake I couldn't help noticing that a more-than-usually well-expressed argument was whispering its quiet way through the small print. I didn't read the motivating letters of Sherlock and Anderson on the theological dispute you seem to be enjoying but the fence has been well-rebuilt in the letters of the April '52 issue and I don't see anybody sitting on it either. A sign of a good fresh debate.

Let me lie myself down on the side of the damned. Of all the letters you printed, the most interesting was that of Dick Ryan. (I'll bet there were some a lot more interesting that will never see the pages of TWS, too) I am an atheist—the word is distasteful and quite loaded—and, though I blush to say, the issue to me is clear-cut, in a pleasantly aristotelian fashion. Not to say that friend Ryan is the same; his tolerance is becoming but his convictions were either that same tolerance or not stated.

Here I stand: the religious attitude does not call for tolerance or antagonism. It is not something active, to be compensated for. It's a hole, a waiting thing for tired and confused minds. Howevermuch Billy Graham chases presidents and congressmen, only those who totter of themselves will fall. The force of social approval drives many to drink the soporific B of the L, but still a man won't change his mind until he feels that he can't trust it any more.

Like Ryan says, it's as much moral laziness and what we don't know makes most people holler, "Yes, Lawd," on Sundays. Most people, though, usually retain enough self-respect to at least make the first try on their own. (Gad, am I shoveling it out on the bias! But taps is long gone and my mind refuses to wrestle with the harmless words semantics demands.)

Nor does the atheist absolve himself from the rule of God to follow his own interests. A man intelligent enough to refuse the drugged teat pressed upon him in his youth will also be intelligent enough to realize that self-survival depends on the feelings and well-being of the people he seeks approval and cooperation from. You don't have to be a hypocritical actor to appreciate affection, children, "sunsets and roses." Rather you have to walk an even straighter path because the responsibility rests ultimately upon yourself, and yourself only. The man who has his warm and steepled kennel to run to can give himself a hell of a long leash and still be sure that it'll be there when he comes back.

I shoulda been a preacher. Allegories yet.

As to science: science has exactly one invaluable contribution to philosophy: the supreme value of observation and deduction under the light of results along a predicted line. Dewey's pragmatism, so attacked today, fell short through one lack; the observation was philosophic, the deduction theoretical, the observed results completely superficial. The real causes, the real results, are just turning up today in the fields of psychology and cybernetics. We're still

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philosophical extroverts, intent on the outward shapes of religion, ethics, the classification of classical and dehumanized concepts, which are actually about as valid as the Four Humours of Man and Phlogiston.

When we start finding out exactly what and why makes man fall all over himself trying to pick up the pieces of his conscience, we'll be able to talk sanely on God and his prophets.

Until that time, this schizophrenic society will continue to have its grotesque proportions of alcoholics, perverts and unsane. How many times has it been said, "Strong laws make strong outlaws?" To protect his property and his well-being, man formulates laws. Ultimately we invented the Ultimate Enforcer; people who differ from the required norm, instead of moving somewhere else, collapse into guilt and worse, because God is everywhere, they need to believe in God, and God will punish. Period.

We are far in arrears on the debts we owe to ourselves. Philip Wylie promulgated the fictional existence of some actually sane people, motivated without guilt by selfishness; and without guilt to make selfishness a petty "gimme," it emerged as the individual's first duty to himself to selfishly better his own lot. With clear eyes, any man can see that humanity is a good thing to belong to if he can help it along; in other words, in serving himself, and realizing it, he will seek to bring others along. Enlightened capitalism of the soul, or call-it-what-you-may; but why do Christians force the Golden Rule onto selfish people by appealing to their selfish desire to go to Heaven when the whole rigamarole is so unnecessary? And, finally, deny any healthy selfishness as one of the prime sins? No wonder we're going nuts.

Why I say "we" instead of "me" is another question. But the only people I know are human, and I like people. Among them we find pretty girls, good buddies, ukelele players, philanthropists, science fiction fans, small children, cats, dogs, flagpole sitters, boat builders, and all the nice guys you ever met. They're waiting, just like me, for somebody to come along and cure the politicians, Communists, and cheap crooks of whatever ails 'em.—*Box 33 RecSta Navy 128, c/o FPO San Francisco, Cal.*

Before the war starts again, let us point out that we do not consider this letter part of the theological controversy which we requested to stagger to a halt. Otherwise we'd have held it out on you, hating ourselves, of course. But despite the off-hand references to the religious attitude this is a statement of a man's honest efforts to understand much of what is not very understandable and its connection with theology is only incidental. The labels which even Van Couvering uses are largely forced upon him by a society condoning too many hypocrisies, as they are forced upon all of us. You are probably lucky if theology gives you all the answers you need. If it does not you have to work out a philosophy for yourself, the hard way, as Van Couvering is trying to do.

SECOND LOOK

by Jockadoon Moir

Dear Sir: I find that quite a few things have taken place during my absence. 1. You published my letter. 2. About 400 readers wrote me in regards this letter. 3. You printed several replies in TWS.

It is the latter I would like to take up first. Especially that one from one Bob Farnham. I received many similar to his except for one thing—that crack about the military changing a person. Evidently the Pvt. fooled Mr. Farnham, as it did several others. There is no doubt in my mind that I have more time on KP and guard duty in the army and air-force than Bobby Boy has in total service. And as for the gentleman he spoke of as being ousted from some Fan Club or other, I am sure the fellow is happy about the whole thing. He probably joined another club where he could express his views and discuss them with other members, without fear of some narrow-minded "official" demanding his ouster. In short, to Mr. Farnham, I give the well-known thumb-to-nose salute.

Now, as to the letters I received. I want to thank all who wrote, including those who sent gems of wit but neglected to sign their names and who thus join the ranks of those classified as Pinheads Anonymous.

About one-fourth of the letters agreed with me and the rest, in no uncertain terms, did not. I notice, however, Ed. that you published only replies that didn't agree with my sentiment while several of the writers who agreed with me stated that they also wrote you. What happened to that fair editorial policy?

In closing, I would like to say that my views have not changed one bit. However, seeing I am outnumbered, I'll bide my time and instead of adding my own contributions to the overall stupidity of the letters published in "The Reader Speaks," make this the last letter to TWS on the subject—for now. —*Y.M.C.A., Butte, Montana.*

During your absence, Jocko, several other feuds blossomed and ye ed, after carefully picking representative letters from each side, was likewise accused by both sides of bias in opposite directions all together at once yet. At which time he commented peevishly that the referee took more punishment than the fighters. So your snide remarks rebound, blunted, from this toughened hide. Your remarks about being outnumbered reminds me of the two rabbits who are chased into a cave by a fox. Remember it?

PHILOSOPHY TOO

by Joe Gibson

Dear Sam: It's things like this which drive men to something drastic, like blondes with convertibles. So all right, it's done now, it can't be undone—so you may as well give with the answers. Who did the cover on the April *Thrilling Wonder*, Sam? Note how pleasantly I ask. Not an unkind thought in my sweet, empty little head. And that whatzit in

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the art department who decided to omit the artists' signatures from the covers—that's the same whatzit who decided that covers needn't illustrate stories, isn't it? All I ask is that you introduce me to this whatzit sometime when there's a barn door handy. I may want to nail a whatzit skin to it.

Joel Rogers' MOMENT WITHOUT TIME seemed to have a convenient arrangement of locale—necessarily so, and certainly permissible. But I was a bit startled to find everyone in Moscow knowing where Stalin and the boys had their diggings. Last time I checked on this intriguing little fact, I heard they kept moving shop around so inside the Kremlin it'd be like trying to pin down a floating crap game. Ah, well—south wing of the Great Kremlin Palace, eh? Hmmm.

Good to see Venus Smith on the agenda, again. And in DOUBLE JEOPARDY, I kept running into Schuyler Street. Upstate New York, too. There's another guy I'd like to see back on the agenda.

TRS has me chasing the mice out of my beard, this issue. So now it's religion. Here's an old one: few people are as religious as atheists. But religion, philosophy, semantics, what-have-you, how can any of it be better than what's done with it? Let's throw in a few more. Nature's wonderful; a million years ago, nature couldn't have known we'd be wearing glasses—yet look where she put our ears; Then there was the guy who said he wasn't afraid of ghosts. So what if one of 'em killed him? Then think what he'd do to it! You can kick this stuff around and make it do anything. Seems that most outstanding figures in history who accomplished much of anything were either religious, tho, or they invented one. The trend will probably continue until somebody works out a better one.

Always seemed to me Blish was writing his articles sort've tongue-in-check; now I see why. Shall we take up a collection and send him to Mars? The guy would probably jump his contract and start running around with some Martian princess, though—

I'll go quietly.—24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N.J.

Ah, well, we all have our off days. Few people are as religious as atheists. Humph. And a stitch in time saves nine—except on a Bikini bathing suit and you buttered your bread, now lie in it and the class will come to order.

Who did the April cover? Emsh, old boy, an artist with more techniques than ever dazzled these cynical old eyes. He can use oils, as you have seen, and he can use an airbrush like Schomburg with very, very dramatic results. You'll be seeing more of him. I think for your sake, Joe, we'll have to start printing the cover artist's name inside on the title page.

LAST ROUND

by Ernest & Bertha Sundet

Dear Sam: For over 15 years both Ernie and myself have read TWS as well as other mags. Your letter department has always been interesting with few exceptions; however, until now I have never felt a great desire to join in personally. It was only after reading Rev. C. M. Moorhead's letter and your reply to it that I decided I had to write.

I agree with you most heartily, Sam, when you say, "Belief is a personal matter," and also when you further stated, "Discussions of theology can so easily get out of the province of a fiction magazine." However, you started it all and you did not seem in the least reluctant to print what was quite clearly an atheist's beliefs. Nor did you seem reluctant to publish a considerable number of letters which shared his point of view except for a few minor details. To me a person who does not believe in a power (God) greater than himself is an atheist, no matter how he explains it. Therefore, since you did mess around in something very personal and have printed (for the most part) the atheist's side of it, it seems to me you owe it to your Christian friends to print more of their views on the subject than you have. After all, aren't all of your fan letters more or less a statement of their personal beliefs and opinions about one subject or another?

A few of the boys who wrote in seemed to assume that few if any Christians read SF mags. They figure Christians are a dumb lot anyway, or people who let fear override reason. They read science fiction because they fancy themselves amateur scientists and people of great wisdom. That's why they pick stories apart and pooh, pooh them all over the place. It makes them feel superior. That is also the reason an atheist denies God. To disclaim a power as great and powerful and intelligent as He must be makes them feel superior, as if somehow, by dethroning God in their minds they elevate themselves to His position and thus feel superior intellectually to those who believe in Him.

You see, I know whereof I speak. I was once an atheist too. I now not only believe in God, but love his son Christ much more than I fear Him. Fear of God comes to everyone at some time in his life if it is only at the last few hours—fear of the unknown. Fear, especially for the atheist because at the final moments when he knows that whatever his beliefs were here, he really doesn't know for sure there is no God and no afterlife. Only a Christian knows for sure that he is going to be all right after death. There is no fear at death for a Christian. The atheist who was so egotistic, so superior here begins to wonder if he really has been so very intelligent after all, he knows, if he has really been using his intelligence, that he has not even been fair nor yet very honest with himself. Why? Because a fair-minded person, at least is willing to admit there are two sides to every question. The really smart person studies both sides of a question, weighing and attempting to evaluate the best course, if he has a choice. If, as the atheist chooses to believe, there really were no God, the most he could have suffered by believing in Him would be ridicule from those who believe there is no God or Hereafter, whereas if he is wrong and there is a God, according to our best authority on God Himself—the Bible—states very plainly that the one and only sin it is impossible for God to forgive, non-belief in Him. Anything else he can forgive, even murder, provided the person is really sincere in his repentance and accepts His Son's sacrifice for him personally.

* * *

Except for a very few, I have enjoyed all of your

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stories and the comic ones immensely. Keep up the good work and we will continue to buy your mag even though we don't always agree with some of your other fans, nor even with you.—*Lake Preston, S. Dakota.*

The asterisks above represent a sizable cut, which was necessitated by the length of this letter, and which continued the argument along much the same lines.

As a determined bystander, I can offer you respect for your sincerity, but I think it only fair to point out that you are doing your cause more harm than good by writing a letter so loaded with the very bias you decry in the opposition. For example, you insist upon fair-mindedness, upon the fact that there are two sides to every question, then you say that *only you* and those who agree with you, know for sure the facts about life and death and the afterlife. That rules the opposition out before they can say a word—is begging the question. You offer as proof of your arguments statements which themselves are not proved—only *you* assume they are proved. I offer these comments merely to underline my earlier remarks that little can be proved and that you only irritate someone when you monkey with his beliefs. You either take them on faith or you don't—logic has nothing to do with it.

And before I can extricate myself, it seems I owe a final word to still another contender, to wit:

EXIT THE SARGE

by Sgt. Edwin Corley

Dear Sam: You're right; drop the theological fracas before someone gets burned: Gone, that subject. Eliminated.

But, ha! my dear sir. This elaborate rebuttal in answer to your comment after my letter in the April ish. Amend your statement to read, "I can think of quite a few people who *succeed in convincing themselves they* would rather know the truth." Because, despite our often sincere insistence that we want to know all, we don't really. Don't consider the comparatively small number of people who have retreated into what is classified "insanity" to escape realities—just peek about at your neighbors; even at the cute stenographer in the next office.

Sure, she's perfectly normal. So are you. And me. Especially me. So let's take one of these normal people and run a quick checklist on the number of realities he's trying to elude. I could dissect myself—but, since a few friends still regard me as only half-cracked, I'd better find another subject. And you're out, because who the hell ever seriously considered an editor as being sane—and, besides, your teeth are so sharp. That leaves the stenographer. Pretty little Miss Snavely, we'll call her.

She's not particularly concerned with Death. It's so far off, and, really, it's impossible (except after reading a "scare" medical article that describes her symptoms *exactly*) to even think of such a thing happening to *her*.

Miss Snavely doesn't pay too much attention to the newspapers, either. Oh, she's read all about the international crisis—and she knows that if war comes, New York City will probably be Target Number One. But she isn't worrying, because things will work out for the best, you see—and even if war does erupt, our boys will stop them before they can bomb American soil (this in the face of definite proof that it would be almost impossible to stop even a majority of enemy bombers . . . and ONE is enough). Move away from the danger area? Oh, she would, if things really were so bad as some people seem to think, but, after all . . .

In a less dramatic light, now, let us delve further into Miss Snavely's systematic retreat from reality. Granted that makeup is as much a part of her dress as her shoes, and that the principle reason for using it is to attract the male of the species, Hector Murgatroyd. However, consider also that Miss Snavely smears on the goo not only for the prime reason listed, but because she wants to look younger or prettier than she is. Partially to impress others—but also to help her mirror convince her that she is *not* losing her beauty, she is *not* getting old.

In other words, Nature has a protective way of not letting us admit the truth to ourselves. Let bad news arrive and see how long it takes to really admit to yourself that it's true. Lose your billfold, and see how many times you look in the same pocket—although it's perfectly obvious that the lost object isn't hiding under a button.

Now, you and I both know that we're going to die. But do we *really* know it? Sure, it's easy to say that when the human machine stops, it ceases to exist. But try to conceive *nothing*. Absolute nothing. Infinity. Call it anything, and try to comprehend it happening to you. (Be honest: telling yourself falsely that you want to face reality is only another way of dodging it!)

You made it sound as though living in false security were an act of cowardice. But false security is actually the *only* security available. And try to live without it. Miss Snavely's got it. Hec Murgatroyd's got it. Why else would he study law at night—knowing that there are umpty-ump unemployed ambulance-chasers, and, more terrible, knowing that in about 50 years that knowledge he's worked so hard for will cease to exist along with the mental and physical entity known as Hector Murgatroyd.

Why would anyone do *anything* if they really believed that it was all fated to this end? Maybe Hec's an altruist. He doesn't care about himself, he wants to benefit humanity for the time he's around, so that he leaves something behind him. But even this noble aim is rooted in one final effort to seek personal immortality in the memory of others. No, Sam, no matter how many realistic facts you confront Hec with, he's got a knack of getting around all of them to believe in a security that may be false, but that at least offers something. And, who can really say it's false, even? If Hec believes it, then it's true for *him*, and seriously, neither Hec or Homo Sapiens has ever been interested in anything else but *I* and *ME*. *We is only an extension of ME.* Even if Hec donates all his money to the poor and gives free lectures to the Temperance League, he's still rooting for himself. Those things satisfy *him*; he is doing them for *himself* and the ultimate benefits are *his*.

He doesn't know or admit this, of course, unless

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he practices self-analysis much more thoroughly than most of us. So, again, he is not facing reality.

Come to think of it, YOU are dispensing one of the most popular means of getting around reality —fiction. You know, go to the moon without leaving your cosy Morris Chair?

All of which leads to a tardy realization that you believe in your own particular code and I mine —but, by way of a parting shot, I find it difficult to believe that even you are 100% realistic with yourself (maybe you can convince me; wanna try?).

On the lighter side, TWS is aging well. The quality of your issues remain fairly high—the April number was a little below par, but *Counter-Transference* made up for the lapse. Glad to see that Finley has replaced his bubble-dancers with geometrical design dancers. Does his name mean so much, though, that you give him a by-line in addition to his signature, and leave us to guess about Engler, Pearson and Schomburg?

Is anyone interested in sending me sample copies of fanzines? I'll subscribe to anything readable, if the editor gets in touch with me (Get the hell away, Joe! Pravda doesn't count, even if it *is* fantasy!).

And while I'm tossing challenges around, I'll answer all letters. My favorite three subjects are: Women. Women. Women. Booze shows up near the top of the list somewhere, and plain and fancy arguing is always fun.

(By the way, tell George O. Smith to stop swiping from Shaw. "Your brains and my beauty" indeed! An equally effective punch line could have been, "Youth is a wonderful thing. What a crime to waste it on children.")

That isn't a hint, it's an exit.—*3860th Comp. Gp., Gunter AFB, Alabama.*

A nice hatchet job, Sarge. Clean thinking, precise phrasing. And a tough one to answer. Try it this way: Nobody can prove, to himself or to outsiders, how much he is trying to escape and how much of the truth he wants to know. We are all a bundle of contradictions, brave about some things, cowardly about others, honest about some, dishonest about others. And oddly enough, fear of death isn't the greatest fear. People face it bravely enough, some through faith in a hereafter, some not believing, but quite willing to accept eternal sleep as good enough. Even belief in a hereafter isn't always enough. Plenty of people who profess to believe are still terrified of dying and make an unseemly fuss about it when they should be going contentedly to their reward.

It does seem a pity to study law or ornithology all night, work in a bakery all day and after fifty or sixty years, just when you are getting to know something about your subject, to kick off. But you don't recognize this when you are young—Miss Snavely's refusal to face grim fact is perhaps not so much cowardice as her half-formulated feeling that there is plenty of time for *that*—that was years and years away—meanwhile the thing to do was to grab at life as it passed her by and get some *living* out of it. We're all gamblers, we all think when we are young that we are going to strike it quick, and afterwards when it turns out tougher than we figured—well you can't *quit* so you keep going, even if the end is futility. What else can you do?

There's heroism there, even of a passive sort, in the average man who has lost a lot of his faith, who looks forward to nothing much, but who keeps plugging because it's undignified to quit. That's your average G. I. and Joe Gibson's commuter and all the little Miss Snavelys.

So long, Sarge.

CLASSIFIED AD

by David S. Gardner

Dear Sam: I wonder if you can let us have a little space in both 'The Reader Speaks' and 'The Ether Vibrates'? By us, I mean THE LIVERPOOL SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY, 'The Space Dive,' 13A, St. Vincent Street, (back of Lime Street Station) Liverpool, England. You see there are quite a number of American service men stationed at Burton Wood U.S.A.A.F. Base some 15 miles from Liverpool and there must surely be some Science-fiction and Fantasy fans amongst them, we wish to extend an invitation to them to visit us at the above named premises any Monday night after 7 p.m. (that being our regular club night).

Being out of touch with their fellow fans back home in the States we thought that they might like to meet some English members of fandom on their home ground to have a chinwag about their favorite authors, yarns and mags. We can promise them that they will be made very welcome indeed by all our members and that they won't feel out of place amongst us. And for any Merseyside readers who also manage to get hold of sf magazines the same message applies to you.

So roll up in your thousands; we hope we can find room for you all, if not, then I dare say we can knock one of the partitions down and spread out a bit.

Thanks for the space and the time.—*63 Island Road, Liverpool, 19. Lancashire, England.*

At the rate English readers are pouring in we're going to have a full sized annex in the British Isles any day now. Not only American service men, but bona fide English citizens.

MORE BITTER THAN SWEET

by Richalex Kirs
The Cosmontrolatra of Talamaya

Dear Mr. Mines: The reason I'm writing *this* letter is I'm afraid that the one I wrote to SS won't get published. I'm taking no chances, no, none at all. First I gotta say sompin' nice about the cover. O.K., Here goes. THE COMPOSITION WAS GOOD!! Aside of having about sixteen glaring faults, some of which are: the planet they are on is evidently rather close to the sun—I'd say about two million miles. How come there's no lava rolling around?, the ship is too small to serve any

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practical purpose, and the shape and size of the steering tubes would not allow them to function. I wonder why the artist started to paint it as if it was an oil and then changed his mind and finished it as if it were a pen and wash.

The outstanding story in this ish was THE PLANET MENDER. It seems to me that this is a *new* idea of weather control. Am I right or did some nogoodnic like Gernsback or Wells think of it a decade or two ago? After all, I've only been reading stf for about five years, so how could I know?

Rogers' MOMENT WITHOUT TIME ran a close second. It should be anthologised or hard-covered or whatever they do with stf classics. When a story this good comes up, the guy who copped it should step up and take a bow. If it didn't belong in a class by itself, I'd rank it with THE CYBERNETIC BRAINS and SHADOW ON THE SAND and THE STARMEN OF LYRDIS. It's a story for an editor to be proud of.

Pratt's DOUBLE JEOPARDY took a nice, fat pratt fall. An overworked plot, hazy setting, and undeveloped characters made it the low point in an otherwise good issue. Mayhap Pratt should stick to whopping together anthologies. Watcha think, huh? TRS suffered from an acute overdose of Blish, who should be dosed with wolfbane. When an author has to defend himself from critics in public, he is evidently on the way out.

Maybe this makes me sound as if I don't like Blish, and if it does, I can't help it. THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS was a great story, but my opinion is that the authors should *stay out* of the letter sections. Besides, Blish talks too much.

Seibel is getting a little conceited, almost like Wigodsky, yet. Why don't you use Tuning's much-referred-to poems and stories? You might as well get it over with. And that reminds me—when you finally get his address, send me a copy, will you? I'd like to correspond with him.—*1441 Overing Street, Bronx 61, New York.*

Thanks, I will take the bow. I grabbed MOMENT WITHOUT TIME with less than my usual lack of hesitation.

SOLEMN DUTY

by Fred Chappell

Dear Sam: Mines, I mean, and may Merwin (the best pulp editor to ever edit—excluding semi-pulp JWC, of course.) rest in peace. Nobody gave him any roses while he lived.

I was enjoying the letters on religion and expecting more issues containing the same old feud. Then I see your reply to a letter. Sez you: "When you monkey with a man's beliefs, you only irritate him." True, so true.

But so what? Don't you know that this self-same article pops up on an average of once a year? Men's beliefs are irritated, fans go to conventions with shotguns, and usually silent onlookers (like me) have a good time listening, and, believe it or not the participants have a good time, too.

So I jump in, feet first, and with malice toward all. I liked Dick Ryan's "There are fanatics and fanatics." When I first read it, I thought that he was going to follow through with a line of thought that I had been dwelling on for a short time. But he did not. Therefore I feel it my solemn duty to write.

Just as there are "fanatics and fanatics," there are gods and gods. The victim of acute religionitis says that There Is Only One True God Who Is All-Powerful And Mighty—But Kind and Benevolent. While the victim of acute atheism-itis says that There Are No Gods And No Punishment, So I Will Do As I Damn Please.

But Ryan is wrong in saying that "The religionists views are too narrow-minded; the atheists are too broad-minded." They are *both* too narrow-minded. While the religionist worships his One True God; the atheist worships just as fervently and religiously his No Gods At All.

One is just as much of a fanatic as the other.

I do not advocate the fence-sitter's views either. He has his god, too: Hey Fellers, Now Don't Go And Get Mad. Maybe You Are *Both* Right. Which is, as you can see, just as nauseating as the other two.

I advocate all three of these viewpoints (no, not a Pleasant Mixture). Each individual should decide which one he wants and stick to it. And that leaves where we started. A vicious circle, ain't it? The Worm Ouroborous, indeed.

Me, I just don't give a damn, anyway. If there's a god—ok I believe in him. If there ain't—well, that's all right, too. But one way or another, I ain't gonna worship either True-God or No-God. Or Maybe-There-Is-And-Maybe-There-Ain't.

I've only read the letter column and Bixby's, so I can't tell you anything about the stories. And anyway, you don't print letters pertaining to the stories anyway.

But the cover. I liked that Cover. The cover was good. And I was surprised when you got Schomburg to do you a cover instead of Bergey (not a bad cover artist at times), but Emsh! The world must be coming to an end!.

You know THE SONG OF VORHU you printed a while ago? Well, I remember the sub-title and the title, but that's all. I don't remember the plot or the illo. Just the title and sub-title (I guess I've said that about enough, so will stop). Anyway, it only goes to show that the story couldn't live up to:

THE SON OF VORHU—for Kettle Drum and Trumpet.

I don't know whether SaMines or WM.iller made it up, but it sure sounds pretty.

Hmm. Never thought that THIS INHABITED UNIVERSE SERIES would stir up a fuss. I can fix that. For the knowledge of life on other worlds read *my* planetary life series in THE EXPLORER (official organ of the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club—membership to the largest correspondence stf club in existence can be obtained by sending 50¢ to Ed Noble for a year's sub to the Explorer—and don't be scared off by my article. EXP—also publishes some of the best material in fandom—).

Andthatsall.—*Box 182, Canton, N. C.*

The thought of anyone giving Merwin roses gave me the first rusty chuckle I've had in a tough week. There is a well-scarred lad, one who could take it. He never yipped, even when the blows were falling the thickest. A solid inspyration 'e was.

(Please turn to page 140)

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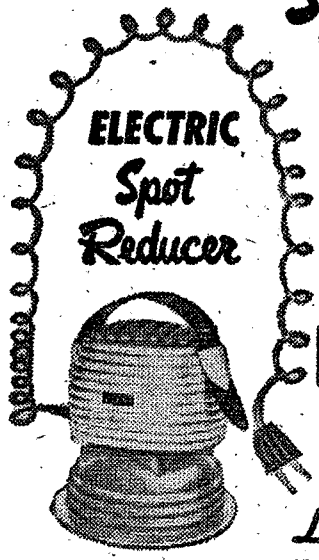

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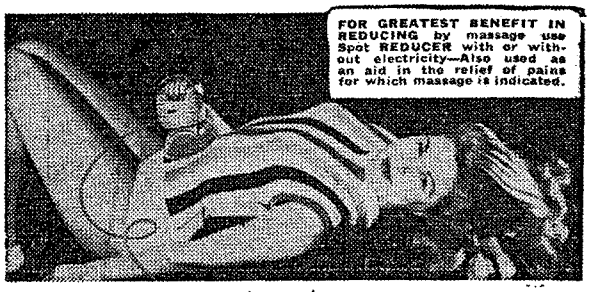

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AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

(Continued from page 138)

About this world coming to an end. You got inside dope, too?

CONFUSING? YEH

by Bill Tuning
The Sinister Solomon of Santa Barbara

Dear Sammywell: And nowwwwww, I shall perform the masterful *coup de gras,* anent my letter in the June ish. Now what I said about Kuttner and Vance *is,* you may be sure, exactly where I said it was in THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF 1950. Look over my letter very carefully. You will note that I never once actually *said* that I really *believed* Henry Kuttner to be one in the same with Jack Vance, now did I? True I *inferred* it most heartily, but that's what you fell for. Also true, I faithfully quoted an opinion on the matter, *inferred,* but I never said that that was *my* exact opinion. So I underrated the opposition, eh? Looks like the opposition underrated the wily 7-Sided Sol (cackle!), and assumed by my inference that I was definitely stating Kuttner to be Vance, which by now you know I wasn't. Just call me Machiavelli, Sammywell.

Sirius-ly tho, who is right, Blieler & Ditky, or you? Are you pulling my leg Sam? If so, be careful of the left one; it has a rheumatic knee. What happened to Blish? Will Fearless Fenwick save the sexy space gal? Tune in next month at thi . . . . no, wait! Where was I? I was? Well. Anyway, if Vance and Kuttner *are* the same, and one is in sunny Italy, and the other is in foggy California, it (Vance-Kuttner) must have a split something-or-other. Wait! Hold it Claude! Did you say fog? You should have your mouth washed out with a travel folder. Perhaps you've heard of the floods out here? We 'uns don't fool around. Part of the year the sun shines. Part of the year it rains like Venus, and the *rest* of the year we have the fog. I go to school by radar beam then so I won't blunder off in the wrong direction and fall down a manhole, or drown in Neptune's fish-pond.

Well, by the syntax of a sweating Saturian, Harlan Ellison was the chap who beset you, huh? From his description of your secretary, I tempted to teleportate to "N'Yawk" myself. If I had the cash, I would anyway. I'd have the cash if you bought one of my stories. Awk! Now I loused up my chances. Honest, Sammywell, I won't come to see you if you buy a story. Pwetty pleeze? Why don't you inaugurate a system to give away your interior illos to us poor letter hacks? You could use the same system that Bixby used when he was an ed. Also, I could like to help Bixl clear up the matter of the morons who think he is a psuedonym for you. Dumb jerks. Jerome Bixby (called by one 7-Sided Sol, Bixl), used to edit PS (See my letter in the May ish for how he got there). As a matter of fact, he is the darling lumbering pterodactyl who published my first letter.

A li'l note to A. E. Hitch . . . Hitchy, old boy, are you there? What if you pushed the button which activated an automatic atomic whatchamajigger to blast ye saucer to a kingdom of cowtails? Incidentally, what's the number on your friend's padded cell? The one who assures you that Asimov, Padgett, and Heinrich what's-his-name (The name is Hauser, dear boy). The friend, not the padded cell. Isaac Asimov is Professor of biochemistry

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at Boston University, but Lewis Padgett is married to C. L. Moore.

Confusing? Yeh. — *811 N. Milpas, Santa Barbara, California.*

Ah, 'tis ashamed of you I am. Trying to crawl out of it by mumbling that you never actually *said* you really believed Henry Kuttner and Jack Vance were one and the same. You sure did heartily *infer* it with both feet, me lad. Who is right, Blieler & Dikty or I? Are you kidding? Anyway, I know Hank Kuttner pussanully; I nearly bought his house up in Hastings-On-Hudson when he pulled out and went to California. And I had a letter from him in California just about the same time I heard from Vance, through his agent, from Italy. And I told you most of that in the June ish, so give up already, willya?

Bixby says thanks.

THE QUESTION PERIOD

By Eldon "Kitty" Everett

Dear Sam: Last night while digging around through the letter sections of some old TWS, I noted that someone wanted stories by Norman Matson. To those who don't know, Matson is the guy who completed Thorne Smith's PASSIONATE WITCH and wrote a sequel to it—BATS IN THE BELFRY (POPULAR LIBRARY edition, 25c). Besides this he's written a couple of other stf yarns, among them DOCTOR FOGG and FLECKER'S MAGIC. A few years ago, in response to reader's requests, you got Les Charteris to do us a yarn, namely—nimbly—THE DARKER DRINK. Why not test reader reaction to the suggestions that you get stories by both Matson and Charteris?

Which reminds me—Hank Moskowitz is trying like mad to start a Captain Future Booster Club to get CF back in his own mag. Can he do it, Sambo? I'd like to see it myself, but you say Ed Hamilton doesn't want to do CF yarns and the non-Hamilton yarns never were too hot. — *P.O. Box 513, Tacoma, Wash.*

Science fiction is not Charteris' regular dish, so it isn't easy to pry a story out of him. Not to mention the little matter of rates he can get from Hollywood and such-like fleshpots that he wouldn't get here. The fact is that your steady supply of science fiction must come from the dependable regulars. Only once in a long while do you get a wandering story from a big name or other irregular and most of the time these stories are freaks—were not written for us and never intended for us, but turned out to be science fiction and found their way home.

As to your other questions—can Hank Moskowitz get Cap Future back in his own mag? Hank asked me that question himself the other day and I said I doubted it, but nothing was entirely certain in this changing world and he was welcome to keep trying. He's starting a Cap

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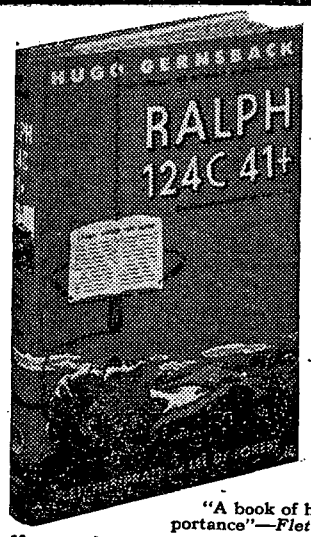

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CALL FROM BALTIMORE

by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: Hello again.

You've got a letter from Dave Hammond already, and he sort of gave me the idea of writing you, to tell you of my own beefs and bouquets.

As far as I'm concerned, you have by far the best novelettes, or short novels if you prefer, on the market. I just finished your June issue of TWS, and thought it was, as a rule, well above par. So did the majority of the BSFF members. That ish made sort of a hit down here. You did O.K. More of Leinster wouldn't hurt.

Another thing I liked was Jerry Bixby's offer to devote a part of his column to fanclubs. As far as I know, you're the only 'zine out that does anything like that. A pretty good deal.

The cover nearly kept me from buying the ish, though. Really, now, you can do better than that, surely. Seems unfair that such a sad cover could spoil a very good 'zine. Finlay's interior illo was better than the past few. Schomburg's seemed a little, well, not exactly cheap, but you get the idea. The others: no comment. Your illos ought to improve along with the stories.

Try getting more of George O. Smith. He shows a spark of genius at times. Often, in fact.

That's about all for now. Ain't it enough? Oh, yes—if you decide to print this, you might say that the BSFF can use a few new members; the old ones are going out of style. Like me.—*The BALTIMORE SCIENCE-FICTION FORUM, Dick Clarkson, President, 410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore 29, Md.*

That June cover was Bergey, not Schomburg. I heard you—Bergey should stick to babes—I heard you. Write me again when you've digested the new illos and new covers.

Jim Harmon—my apologies for tabling your letter. It was long, it also would have added fuel to the theological battle which I'd just as soon see die down. Your leaping to the defense of Bob Farnham is appreciated, but it wasn't I who called him a pinhead, he headed, his own letter that way. We enjoyed your flattering remarks about artist Emsh (lots of new work of his coming up) I personally blinked twice at your insistence that FIND THE SCULPTOR was one of the greatest stf stories ever written (are you kidding?) and beamed at your final sentence, quote: "I love your two magazines as much as anybody can love an inanimate object." Thanks pal.

Other good letters were crowded out, I grieve to say. Owen Cunningham, Bob Farnham, Joe Kinne, Jim Kemmerling, Klaus Kaufman, Basil Guiley, Paul Topelian, Robert Steele and a few million others.

To Bill Nolan—I gave you a plug in an earlier issue. But for those who didn't see it: Bill has gotten out a super photo-offset job on Ray Bradbury with articles by Ray himself, Anthony Boucher, Henry Kuttner, Chad Oliver and others. Fifty cents from William Nolan, 4458-56th Street, San Diego, Cal.

Next month a new Crossen novelet THE POLLUXIAN PRETENDER, and a delicate, witty tale of life on Mars by Wallace West, THE BIRD OF TIME, plus a rollicking Magnus Ridolph story, THE KOKOD WARRIORS, by Jack Vance—a trio of brilliant stories. See you all then. —*The Editor*

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The FRYING PAN

A Commentary on Fandom

LUCKY us! . . . we were slouched in front of our typewriter, just about to buckle down and try to think of something to say about fans and fanzines, when Judy Merril breezed into the office.

"Whatcha doing?" she said.

"Fan-column," we groaned.

"Gee," she cried, "*I* always wanted to write a fan-column!"

We got up, grabbed her by the neck (you gotta treat 'em rough), threw her into our chair . . . and here she is:

. . . rubbing her neck, and wondering what to do now. I mean *my* neck. That editorial plural always confuses me.

The trouble is, as heroes of science-fiction stories are always finding out (in the yarns that end, "He woke up, and stared at the piece of laktaniumite-talahoolium still clutched in his hand, and wondered. . . .") it can be disconcerting to have your dreams come true. Ask any editor how he felt the time he really did sit down to write a story. (Any editor except Bixby; he's strictly from schizo, and turns into a were-writer at night.) And when you're—I mean I'm—sitting home slaving over a hot story, and pick up a copy of TWS for a spot of stimulation, relaxation, or whatever else I figure will keep me from the writing of the story . . . that breezy, easy fan-colyum looks like *the* way to make a living.

Now I'm on the spot, because Mines and Bixby both are boring eyeholes in my back as I sit here, waiting to see how funny I can be on short notice; and I don't feel funny.

I'm inclined to make some serious remarks here on a subject that's been bothering me

[*Turn page*]

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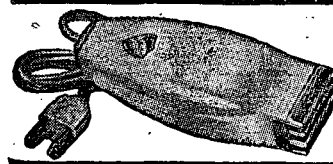

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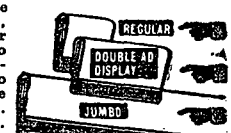

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for—let's see—it's four years now since the not-very-funny gag first came up in Toronto. Since then it's grown to major proportions, and I understand there are fans hither and yon who are still annoyed at me for speaking my mind on the matter in New Orleans last Labor Day. Most of them are yon—in Frisco—I mean San Francisco—whoops, Les and Es, I mean *the Bay Area.*

That's because it was the spokesman for the San Francisco delegation who brought up the "fan-racist" business at the Nolacon. He got, as I said at the time, under my 'skin . . . so I teed off on him.

Let me make this clear. I would be the last one to deny that fans—*all* fans—are slans. I am not, in the smallest particle, trying to detract from the high opinion Joe Doppleburger so justifiably held himself in (so find some *other* place for that preposition!). My fight, and I'm dedicated to it, is to get the fans to face the fact that—now brace yourselves; this may hurt—the guys who *write* the stories are maybe odd Johns and Janes too.

It will probably come as a distinct shock to the theorists of fan-jingoism, but a lot of scific writers *read it too.* And a lot of us like it. I can go farther; some of us even get together from time to time to *talk* about it. We say brilliant things like:

"Hey, wasn't that cover a dilly!" and,

"I tried to get the illos from my last story, but that Mines wanted 'em for himself," and

"I don't know . . . he had a good idea there, but too much gobbledegook," or any number of other inspired things, most extraordinarily unlike what you and you may have to say.

Or is it?

All of which is tossed in as supporting evidence for my main argument: the pros like conventions too—really we do. We don't come to them to make money. We don't come to sell books, or buy at the auction, or meet movie producers, or steal story ideas. We come to listen to the good talk, and do as much of it as anybody will let us squeeze in edgewise. We come to meet the other people who read and write and talk about science fiction. We come, even as you and you, to get away from home and have a drink in a strange city with somebody else who isn't ashamed to be seen in a bar looking at a Bergey cover. In short, and with emphasis, we come to have a good time—and do, except when we're being stared at suspiciously by a fan who knows that science fiction would be a sweeter world without the *authors* lousing it up!

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Which brings me around to the other matter that's on my mind. In New Orleans, I got mad enough to *do* some lousing up. At least I credit myself with some part in the defeat of San Francisco for the '52 convention. I understand miscellaneous folks in the Bay Area credit me likewise; so this is as good a time as any to make amends—and friends.

S. F. for S. F.! Or: San Francisco in '53.—*Judith Merril*

Easiest column we ever wrote.

. . . and we sort of came across, in a left-handed way . . . eh, Coles?

—JEROME BIXBY

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•

THE POLLUXIAN PRETENDER

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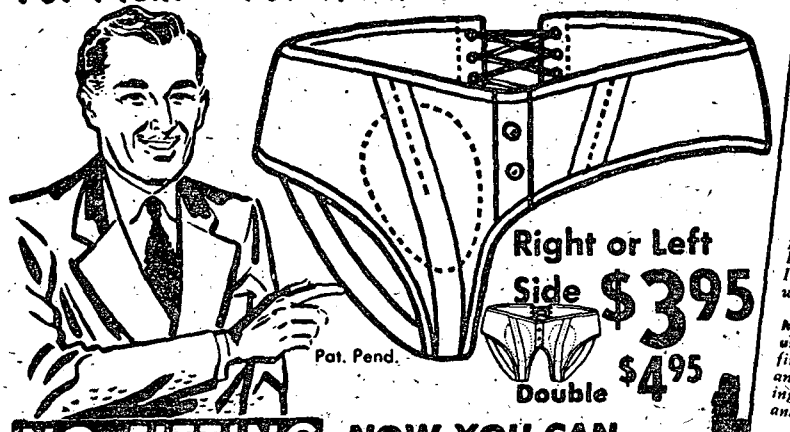

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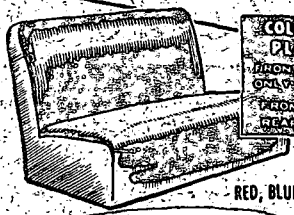

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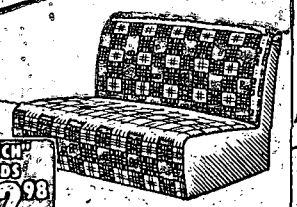

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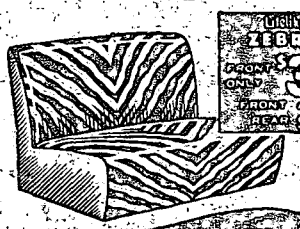

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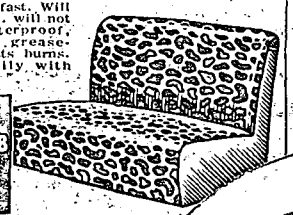

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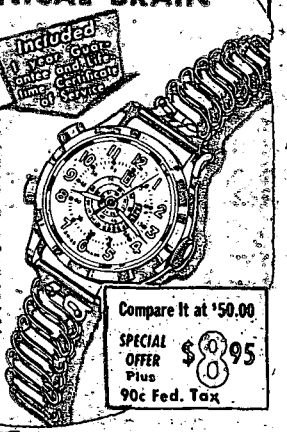

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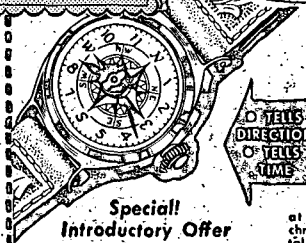

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